

The Faith and Sacraments of the Mar Thoma Church



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the Mar Thoma
Church



Rev. Dr. George Mathew Kuttiyil

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**THE FAITH AND
SACRAMENTS OF THE
MAR THOMA CHURCH**

About the Author

Rev. George Mathew graduated from Kerala University, and acquired MA(Sociology) from Pune University and B.D. from Serampore University. He was ordained as a priest of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church in 1981. Rev. Mathew secured M.Phil. in Liturgy from Trinity Theological College Bristol, England. In 1998 he obtained Doctor of Theology(D.Th) from Pontifical Oriental Institute, Vadavathoor, Kottayam, for his research study on the Holy Qurbana (Eucharist).

Rev. George Mathew was Lecturer at FFRRC, Kottayam, E.J. Institute of Evangelism, Kompady. At present he is the Lecturer of Liturgy at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary Kottayam. He is the convenor of Mar Thoma Lectionary Committee and Mar Thoma Liturgical Commission, member of the General Assembly of the Communion of Churches in India (CCI) and Commission on Worship and Mission of CCI. He has written fifty articles in Malayalam and in English in the area of Liturgy and Sacraments and participated in several liturgical conferences and seminars representing Mar Thoma Church. Rev. George Mathew was formerly vicar of the Mar Thoma Church London, and Keezhillam. At present he is serving as the Vicar of the Mar Thoma Church, Vadavathoor and member of the Mar Thoma Vaideeka Selection Committee. His wife is Mrs. Jessey Mathew, B.Sc., B.D. and sons are Mathews George and Thomas George (Students).

Published Books

1. *Sabhayude Koodashakalum Aaradhanayum Oru Padanam* (MTYS)
2. *Eucharist: The Celebration of the Economy of Salvation* (OIRSI)
3. *Christheeya Koodashakalkku Oru Aamukham* (CSS)

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Rev. Dr. George Mathew



CHRISTAVA SAHITYA SAMITHI
TIRUVALLA



THE FAITH AND SACRAMENTS OF
THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

Author: Rev. Dr. George Mathew

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Foreword

(First Edition)

The book *The Faith and Sacraments of the Mar Thoma Church* written by Rev. Dr. George Mathew, is an authentic and substantial work on that subject. He goes into the liturgy and draws out its meaning, goal and usefulness and makes it comprehensible to the ordinary reader. More often liturgy is kept too high or far off from the comprehension of the common person. But the author had brought it very close to the heart and head of the worshipper. Meaningful participation in liturgical life is an inexplicable experience and an invaluable blessing.

Liturgical life of a Christian is not limited to Sunday worship alone. It is continued all through the weekdays also. Fr. Dr. Ion Bria, the Romanian Orthodox Theologian who expounds this idea has correctly titled his book “Liturgy after Liturgy”. Sacraments have a big role in shaping the life of a person. For a true believer no sacrament is a ritual. Every sacrament is a means of grace and a renewing experience. As it is an outward expression of an inward grace it affects the whole being of the recipient. Correct knowledge and right perspective is very essential for a proper understanding and living experience in and through the sacrament.

Rev. Dr. George Mathew has given a great contribution to the church and the English speaking community by his short and sound publication on Sacraments. This brief yet comprehensive book greatly fills a gap and meets a dire need of our English speaking new generation within India and in the “Diaspora”. Our youngsters very often ask, why? to many of the sacramental acts! Their genuine doubts must be cleared. They should know the how? why? and what? of religious acts and faith.

This book gives a clear as well as basic knowledge about the seven principal Sacraments of the church. The reading of this book will challenge, enthuse and guide the readers to participate in the liturgy and to receive the sacraments hopefully and joyfully. I commend all to have a copy of this book in their personal library. I hope more books will come out from the author in the coming days and enrich the believers.

With prayers, blessings and good wishes

Bishop Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus,
M.T. Bhavan, Chennai

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beloved father Kuttiyl George Mathew, Field View, Aruvappulam, Konni, Pathanamthitta Dist. who has always been an encouragement in my studies and ministry.

Preface

(First Edition)

Sacraments are the divine activity which prepare the believers for God's grace and mission through the salvific work of Christ. It is an experience of receiving God's grace by the worship of the believers, through the symbolic rites of the church. One recognizes the presence of God and responds to it through the sacraments. The believers are sanctified by the Holy spirit in and through the sacraments. They also express their faith. The people gather together for worship with a view to go out into the world with the love of God. They are empowered by the Holy Spirit and receive the commissioning for mission. The people of God express readiness for worship, renewal in the Spirit and dedication for mission through the sacraments.

The faith and theology of the Eastern Church has not been codified as 'Articles of Faith'. It is embedded in the liturgy of the church. So in order to understand the faith of a particular church, one has to analyze the liturgy of the church along with Scriptures. This short book is a study of the 'Faith and Sacraments of the Mar Thoma Church, analyzed in the light of the Bible, liturgical texts and history and tradition of the church. This book deals with the seven sacraments which are generally accepted by the Christian Churches-viz:- Holy Baptism, Anointing of Mooron (Chrismation), Confession, Holy Qurbana (Communion), Holy Matrimony, Ordination and Anointing the sick. A brief history of the Mar Thoma Church and a historical introduction to the sacraments are given in the beginning chapters. Most of the studies were written originally in Malayalam for various conferences, Church Journals like *Malankara Sabha Tharaka* and *Parish Ministry*. This book has been published in Malayalam by

C S S in 2002. Several people, especially our youths from outside Kerala, demanded for an English version of this book, which I took up as a challenge.

I am indebted to several people for the publication of this book. First of all I would like to express my gratitude to Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Thirumeni (The Bishop of Madrass-Calcutta Diocease) for his constant support for my theological studies and especially for writing a profound foreword to this book. I am immensely grateful to Adv. L. C. Samuel and Mrs. Achamma Samuel of the Bangalore Mar Thoma Parish for translating my original Malayalam manuscript into English. My thanks are also due to Ms. Silveena Mathew, office assistant of the Bangalore Mar Thoma parish who typed the manuscript. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Rev. Dr. T. M. Philip, consultant of C S S and Rev. Raju Anchery, Secretary of C S S who undertook the publication of this book.

I hope and pray that this book may be of help to many members of our church, especially the diaspora community to understand the real meaning of the Faith and Sacraments of the church, and thereby participate actively in the worship and mission of our church. With this desire and expectation, I humbly present this book before the esteemed members of the church.

Koodash Eetho
(Sanctification of the Church)
November 2003

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I

A BRIEF HISTORY AND FAITH OF THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

The St. Thomas Tradition

Traditionally it is believed that St. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ was the founder of the church on the Malabar coast in South India¹. The tradition holds that, in 52 A.D., St. Thomas in the course of his missionary adventure landed at Crangannore (Kodungaloor) a famous ancient port on the coast of Malabar. This church is known as the St. Thomas Church or Mar Thoma Church. In the declarations of the constitution of the Mar Thoma Church it is stated 'The Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, believed to have been founded by St. Thomas one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ the saviour of the world and known by the name of the Apostle, is part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic church'. He visited several places and preached the gospel of salvation and gained many followers from the local community. St. Thomas founded seven churches (community of believers) along the coastal line. Later he went to the coast of South India and preached Christ. After evangelizing that area he was martyred in Mylapore near Madras where he was buried in the year AD 72, according to tradition². Very little is known of the history of the Malankara Church during the first few centuries.

The Malankara Church was in spiritual relationship or communion with the Church of Persia (East) from 4th to 15th century.

Connection with the Roman Catholic Church

Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese General arrived in Calicut in 1498. This was considered as a favorable occasion for the advancement of Roman Catholicism by the Pope. Missionary activities began along the sea coast. In 1592 Alexes de Menezes arrived, who played a decisive role in the Romanization of the Malankara Church³. In 1599 he convened a synod at Diamper which is known as '*Udayamperur Sunnahadose*'. The representatives were asked to sign the decrees which were read out and thus the Malankara Church came under the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. New doctrines and practices were introduced. The old records and prayer books were burned. Over half a century, the Malankara Church was under the domination of the Roman Church.

Declaration of Independence (*Coonen Cross Oath*)

There were some people from within the church who reacted against the Romanisation tendency and opposed the Latinisation of liturgy. People under the leadership of Archdeacon Thomas assembled around the stone cross in the church yard at Mattancheri near Kochi and touching it or clinging to the long rope that was tied on it, took oath that they were severing all connection with the Roman church. This event is known as Coonen Cross Oath (Bent cross) and thus the declaration of independence took place in the year A.D. 1653. They accepted the leadership of Archdeacon Thomas and twelve priests joined together and raised him to the episcopate under the title Mar Thoma I as a temporary measure in 1653. But some followed Roman Catholicism even after that. Thus the once united church was divided into two; the independent church at Malankara and one in relationship with Rome.

The Jacobite Connections

The Dutch captured Cochin from the Portuguese in 1663 and the Roman Catholic influence began to decline. In 1665 Mar Gregorios Metropolitan of Jerusalem, a Bishop under the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch landed in Cochin. Mar Thoma I and his people welcomed him. Mar Gregorios consecrated Mar Thoma I and the validity of his Episcopal status was confirmed. Through this consecration, the Malankara church came into contact with Jacobites. Gradually they introduced the west Syrian (Antiochene) liturgy into the worship of the Malankara church.

Nine bishops or *Metrans* with the title of Mar Thoma, and four with the title of Dionysius, held ecclesiastical authority from 1665 to the first half of the nineteenth century. Some of the consecrations were performed by local *Metrans* and others by foreign prelates.

The Formation of the Independent Syrian Church

In 1772 Mar Gregorios, another bishop from west Asia who was in Travancore consecrated a priest called Abraham Kattumangattu as *Metran* with the name Koorilos (Cyril). His authority as bishop was questioned by Mar Thoma VI, the Metropolitan of Malankara. So the newly consecrated Metran Mar Koorilos had to leave Travancore and went to British Malabar. There he established with seat at Anjoor, Thozhiyoor near Kunnankulam and this church is later known as the Malabar Independent Syrian Church (Thozhiyoor church) which continues till this day. Later their *Metrans* made their peace with Dionysius I's successors and were even consecrated bishops for the undivided Malankara Church and for the Mar Thoma Church. Mar Thoma church still keeps its unique relationship with this church especially during consecration of bishops.

The Malankara Church and The Anglican Church

In the beginning of the 19th Century Travancore and Cochin entered into a treaty with the British Government. According to this, a British Resident was to live in Travancore. Colonel Macaulay was the first British Resident. It was during his time and that of Dionysius I (The great), that Claudius Buchanan, a chaplain of East India Company visited Travancore. His publication of *Christian Researches in Asia* (1812) brought the Christians of St. Thomas to the attention of Christians of England, especially with the Church Missionary Society or CMS of the Anglican Church⁴.

In 1810 Colonel Munro took office as the Resident of Travancore and Cochin. He was an efficient administrator and devout Christian. He developed a deep interest in the non Roman Church at Malankara and was eager to help the church and community. He found in them many things which are not in accordance with teachings of scripture and practice of the early church. He hoped this church could be purged by means of sound general education and the circulation of the Bible among the people and the spread of the evangelical doctrine.

The Need for Reformation

The social and religious state of the church was at a low ebb. There was no spiritual vitality or missionary zeal. The clergy were

uneducated and there was no centre for their training. Compulsory celibacy of the clergy introduced by Roman church remained the rule. Clergy were ordained even at an early age without any theological training. The church services were conducted in Syriac which the people did not understand and even the celebrant understood only imperfectly. Superstitious practices which prevailed among the non-Christian people affected Christians also.

Coming of the Mission of Help

Colonel Munro saw the need in the Syrian church and wrote to the Church Missionary Society requesting them to send a 'Mission of Help'. The C M S responded to the call. The Rev. Thomas Norton was the first missionary sent by CMS to Travancore in 1816. Rev. Benjamin Bailey followed him in the same year. Rev. J. Fenn and Henry Baker arrived in 1818 and 1819 respectively. They concentrated in secular education, translation of the Bible and Prayer Book and theological education. Metropolitan Pulikotil Mar Dionysious started a seminary in Kottayam and Joseph Fenn was in charge of training the clergy.

The missionaries assured the Syrians that it was not their intention to bring the church under Anglicanism but to free her from the evil effect of wrong doctrines and bring her back to the purity of the gospel. But in 1836 through the Synod held at Mavelikara, the Malabar church decided to sever its connection with the missionaries and the Metropolitan was not in favour of a reformation in the church as demanded by the missionaries. The CMS began its work among the downtrodden. Some joined in the Anglican church and an Anglican Diocese of Travancore was formed in 1878 which is now part of the Church of South India.

REFORMATION

A liturgical Renewal of the Malankara Church

Many members of the Malankara church, who desired reform stayed within the church with the hope of carrying out necessary reforms inside the church itself. There were two priests associated with the missionaries in the work of the seminary and the spiritual life and teachings emphasized by the missionaries had a great appeal for them. These were Abraham Malpan (Teacher) of Palakunnathu Maramon, and Geevarghese Malpan of Kaithayil, Puthupally, Kottayam. They were teaching in the Seminary at Kottayam and were not ready to leave the Malankara church and join the missionaries, instead remained in the church and tried to reform the church from

within. Twelve priests joined together and submitted a memorandum to the British Resident in 1836. These were twenty three points concerning church practices which were opposed to a reformed faith as they understood it⁵. They complained these were corruptions which had crept into the church. The memorandum contained complaints against such practices as prayers for the dead, the keeping of relics of saints in the churches, and failure to use scripture for instruction. It attacked certain corrupt practices in the community and the church which affected the spiritual life of the people. This memorandum to the Resident is known as the “Trumpet call of the Reformation”.

This petition was ignored and the Metropolitan Cheppattu Mar Dionysius prohibited the missionaries from preaching in the churches and threatened that those who invited them to the church would be excommunicated. Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan and Abraham Malpan had already prepared a revised version of the liturgy omitting everything which one could not find scriptural warrant. The liturgy was translated into Malayalam along with revision and in 1836, they celebrated Holy Qurbana in their respective churches, Kollad and Maramon.

Liturgical Revisions

Following are the major changes Abraham Malpan made in his revision of liturgy and practice. The reformers also emphasized that we are saved by the grace of God and not by any human deed or work. Through repentance and confession, we have to come to the Lord to receive His grace. Reading the Word of God and living according to that is also important.

All prayers for the departed and to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints were omitted since Christ is the only mediator. All elements in the prayers which overemphasized the sacrificial aspect in the Eucharist were eliminated, and prayers which had some kind of reference to the transubstantiation of the bread and wine were revised. With regard to practice, certain changes were also made. Communion had to be administered in both kind separately, and the Eucharist or Holy communion was not to be celebrated when there was no one to receive it. Confession in private to a priest was also abolished. The service had to be conducted in the language of the people in Malayalam.

Abraham Malpan also broke the statue used at the Maramon church festival, which he declared as idolatry. Later this festival

altogether was abolished. He appreciated the teachings of the missionaries and took over the leadership of the Reform Movement since the missionaries had left the seminary. The use of the revised liturgy and the changes he brought about in the practices offended the Metropolitan Mar Dionysius and he refused to ordain the deacons who were trained by Abraham Malpan⁶.

Malpan decided to remain within the old traditions of the Syrian Church as much as possible and to bring about a reform in the light of the Bible, but he believed that without a *Metran* to support him, a reformation would not be possible. He was not ready to give up the Apostolic tradition and a valid episcopate. Therefore he arranged for his nephew, Deacon Mathew, who had been studying in a Church Missionary School in Madras to go to Mardin in Syria, where the Patriarch of Antioch resided and seek consecration from the Patriarch himself. Deacon Mathew arrived in Mardin in July 1841. He was duly ordained as priest and consecrated as Metropolitan with the name Mathews Mar Athanasius. He stayed there for two years and returned to Malankara in 1843.

When the new Metropolitan returned to Malabar (Malankara), the old Metropolitan Mar Dionysius opposed his attempt to get Government proclamation in his favour as Metropolitan of Malankara. Mar Athanasius favoured to some extent the reforms of his uncle Abraham Malpan, but also tried not to alienate the conservative group who opposed the reformation. The struggle for position between these two Metropolitans was prolonged for about ten years. In 1852 Mathews Mar Athanasius was confirmed by Royal proclamation as the 'Metropolitan of Malankara'. Abraham Malpan passed away in 1845.

Once he was recognized as the Metropolitan, Mar Athanasius took up seriously the cause of reformation. Cheppattu Mar Dionysius was getting old, and to meet the situation, the section which opposed reform movement, sent Rev. Joseph Pulicottil to Mardin to the Patriarch, who returned in 1865 as Metropolitan Joseph Dionysius. Cheppattu Mar Dionysius returned to a village church where he died later. In 1868 Mar Athanasius consecrated the priest Thomas Palakkunnathu, his cousin and son of Abraham Malpan, with the name Thomas Mar Athanasius. Now the reform movement began to progress. The reformed section of the Malankara Church had in their possession the old Seminary at Kottayam and Thomas Mar Athanasius resided there.

In 1875 the Patriarch of Antioch Peter III came to Malankara. Mathews Mar Athanasius ruled as Metropolitan of Malankara until 1876, when the Royal Proclamation was withdrawn and the different claimants were asked to fight out their case in a court of law. In 1876 the Patriarch summoned a Synod at Mulamthuruthi, near Ernakulam, which passed resolutions attempting to settle the relationship of the Malankara Church to the Patriarchal See. Each parish had to execute a registered deed of complete submission to the Patriarch. He divided the See of Malankara into seven dioceses and consecrated four new bishops.

Division in the Malankara Church

Mathews Mar Athanasius continued his ministry until his death on 15th July 1877. Thomas Mar Athanasius succeeded and led the reformed section of the church. There followed a series of cases in the court for the possession of the Old Seminary and church properties, which is known as the 'Seminary case'. The case between Joseph Mar Dionysius and Thomas Mar Athanasius came for the final disposal in the Royal court of appeal in Trivandrum in 1889. Two of the three judges in the high court decided that Joseph Dionysius was the rightful Metropolitan of the Malankara Church and the church was under the Patriarch. The one English judge Justice Ormsby decided in favour of Thomas Mar Athanasius holding that the Malankara church had always been an independent church. Thomas Mar Athanasius and his party had to leave the seminary and the reformed section lost everything in litigation except a few churches. A series of court cases followed for the individual churches, and as a result in 1889, the undivided non-Roman church in Malankara was divided into two separate churches, namely the Jacobite (later Orthodox) and the Mar Thoma Syrian Churches.

The Growth of the Mar Thoma church ⁷

The Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association was founded in 1888 to spread the gospel in and outside the church. The Mar Thoma Church had to build new churches. Thomas Mar Athanasius who sustained the church during the difficult times passed away in 1893 without consecrating a successor. Joseph Mar Athanasius I and Geevarghese Mar Koorilose of Thozhiyur Church came and consecrated priest Titus Palakunnathu, younger son of Abraham Malpan and brother of Thomas Mar Athanasius as Titus I Mar Thoma in 1894 at Cheriapally (Little Church) Kottayam, inspite of the opposition from the Jacobites. During his time the foundation for much of the spiritual activities of the church

were laid. Preaching, Bible reading and prayer in the church and home were greatly emphasized during that time. The missionary work of the church also expanded.

In 1899 Titus I Mar Thoma consecrated his nephew with the name Titus II with the assistance of Geevarghese Mar Koorilose of Thozhiyur Church. In 1911 Titus I Mar Thoma passed away and Titus II became the Mar Thoma Metropolitan. His time of administration was a period of rapid expansion of the church. In 1917 Bishop Abraham was consecrated as his Suffragan Metropolitan. More systematic attempts at liturgical reforms were initiated during the time of Titus II Metropolitan. A constitution for the church was formulated. In 1926 The Mar Thoma Theological Seminary was established in Kottayam. Titus II Mar Thoma passed away in 1944 and Suffragan Metropolitan succeeded him with the name Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan. He infused new spirit and vigour into the evangelistic work of the church. His vision of 'Evangelism as the task of every Christian' led to the starting of Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists Association and *Suvishesha Sevikasangham* (Women's Auxiliary). He was well known as a missionary. Two more bishops were consecrated in 1937. They were Juhanon Mar Timotheos and Mathews Mar Athanasius.

In 1947 Abraham Mar Thoma passed away and Juhanon Mar Thoma succeeded him as the Mar Thoma Metropolitan. In 1953 three more bishops were consecrated. They were Alexander Mar Theophilus, Thomas Mar Athanasius and Philipose Mar Chrysostom. Mathews Mar Athanasius passed away in 1973. Two more bishops, Joseph Mar Irenaeus and Easo Mar Timotheos were consecrated in 1975. Juhanon Mar Thoma passed away in the year 1976. Alexander Mar Theophilus succeeded him in the same year as the Metropolitan. In 1980 Zacharias Mar Theophilus was consecrated as bishop. Thomas Mar Athanasius passed away in 1984 and Easo Mar Timotheos in 1988. The service of more bishops was needed because of the growth and expansion of the church. In 1989, three more bishops, Geevarghese Mar Athanasius, Geevarghese Mar Theodosius and Euyakim Mar Coorilos were consecrated. In the year 1993 three more bishops were consecrated. They were Joseph Mar Barnabas, Thomas Mar Timothios and Issac Mar Philoxenos respectively. Alexander Mar Thoma passed away in 2001. In the year 2000 itself Philipose Mar Chrysostom was elevated to the office of Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Now the Mar Thoma church has Ten bishops and 825 clergy. Abraham Mar Paulose has been consecrated as bishop in 2005. The entire church is divided into 12 dioceses with 1075 parishes besides India in

Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, the Middle East, North America, United Kingdom and South Africa.

Ecumenical Relationship

The Mar Thoma Church is in full communion with the worldwide Anglican communion. The Church of South India (CSI) and Church of North India and Mar Thoma Church have full communion relationship through Communion of Churches in India (CCI). The Church has also maintained an active part in the World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and Kerala Council of Churches (KCC) right from their inception. Mar Thoma Church has a unique relationship with the Malabar Independent Syrian Church (Thozhiyoor). The church is in dialogue with the Orthodox Syrian Church and Lutheran Church. The Church leaders, bishops, clergy and laity alike give leadership in various ecumenical bodies locally and globally.

Liturgical Year and Christian Calendar of the Church

In the eastern church, the entire salvation events of Christ, like birth, circumcision, baptism, presentation in the temple, public ministry, transfiguration, passion, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost are commemorated and celebrated in a progressive order throughout the year. This arrangement is known as Liturgical Year or Christian Calendar. The liturgical year is the unfolding of the mysteries of Christ through the prayers of the church in the course of one year.

Lectionary of the Church

The reading of scripture on a theme and events referred to the salvific work of Christ is known as the lectionary. The place of scripture reading during worship is of paramount importance. In the Christian church which was rooted in the Jewish background, it was common to read the Old Testament in the liturgy. In a Jewish worship readings were in the following order: Pentateuch (*Thora*), Prophets (*Nabim*), Psalm (*Masmoor*). Later on in the Christian church, this reading pattern was followed from the Apostolic time. Along with the Old Testament, the Epistle of Apostles (*Sleeha*) Gospel (*Evangelion*) were also read. In early days the lectionary was not arranged in a systematic manner but was a random selection. From 4th century onwards it was read on the basis of salvation themes. During 6th century an arranged and ordered lectionary system developed⁸.

Mar Thoma Church which follows the Antiochene (West Syrian) liturgical tradition uses the lectionary of that tradition with adaptations.

As an eastern reformed church, the reformed principles are reflected in the readings of the church.

Fasts and Feast in the Church

Though the Mar Thoma Church's lectionary is arranged from January to December (chronological order) the liturgical year begins with the feast of sanctification of the Church. Here we are only mentioning the major Fast and Feast of the church as given in the lectionary. A detailed study is not attempted at this point.

The Sanctification of the Church (*Kudash Etho*)

With this festival, the liturgical year begins. It falls on the last Sunday (30th or 31st) of October or the first Sunday in November. By celebrating, 'sanctification of the church', the church is presented as the bride of Christ (Eph.5:22-33), who prepares for his marriage feast (Rev.15:6,7) by participating in the mysteries of Christ throughout the year. It is also the occasion of the sanctification of the faithful to receive the incarnated Christ.

The Renewal of the Church (*Hudos Etho*)

Through this festival, the church after cleansing and renewing herself, waits to receive the incarnated Christ. A preparation for advent is the emphasis of this festival. The renewal of the church falls after the sanctification.

The period from sanctification to the birth of our Lord is known as Annunciation (*Subaro*) Nativity (*Yaldo*) period.

Annunciation (*Subaro*)

Various announcements as part of the salvific work of Christ is recalled during this season. For example the announcement about the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, Annunciation to Holy Virgin Mary about the birth of Jesus, Revelation to Joseph etc. are remembered.

25 Days Lent

This lent is observed in connection with the birth of Jesus Christ. In the Eastern church, December 1-25 is a fast season. It calls the believers to receive Jesus Christ into their lives. The church celebrates the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ on 25th December with great joy which is known as the Nativity (*yaldo*=Birth). Jesus's earthly life and ministry are salvific. So the church celebrates it with due importance.

Circumcision of Jesus

On 1st January, the church recalls the circumcision of Jesus according to Jewish custom. It reminds us that he was born under the law to redeem the world (Gal.4: 4-7)

Baptism of Jesus (*Danha /Epiphany*)

The church remembers with gratitude the baptism of Jesus on 6th January where by he identified with the sinful humanity. In the churches with the western liturgical tradition, it is the remembrance of the visitation of the wise men from the East. This festival is also known as Epiphany (Revelation) because Jesus was revealed to the gentiles too.

Entry/Presentation of our Lord in the temple (*Mayaltho*).

This festival is observed on 2nd February. By celebrating this the church proclaims that Jesus came not to remove the law but to fulfill it or he was not against the law.

The Fast of Nineveh (*Three days Lent*)

The church observes the Fast of Nineveh or three days Lent 18 days before the 'Great Lent'. So this is known as 'Little Lent'. The confession and conversion of Jonah and the people of Nineveh are the thrust of this Fast.

The Great Lent (*Saumo Rabo*)

The church enters into the Great Lent in the month of February or March which is calculated on the basis of the lunar calendar. This is also known as 'Fifty Days Lent'. In the Syrian Liturgical tradition, it is a time of confession, conversion and renewal of the faithful. They also desire to live in the experience of the kingdom of God. Each Sunday has a particular theme from the gospels, which manifests the healing, transforming power of Christ during his earthly ministry.

The great lent begins with the '**Service of Reconciliation**' (*Shubkono*) on the first Monday in Lent. The clergy and laity gather in the church on that day and seek mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. They pray for the blessings of the observance of the Lent. In the churches with Western liturgical tradition, the Lent begins on the Ash Wednesday. They draw the sign of the cross on the forehead with ashes, which symbolizes the penitence and confession.

Mid-Lent is observed on the 25th day of great Lent which always falls on a Wednesday. On the 40th day of Lent (known as **40th Friday**),

there is a special service in the church. The forty days symbolize the forty days fasting of Jesus Christ in the wilderness. During the next ten days the believers identify with the passion, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On **Palm Sunday** (*Hosana*), the great entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is celebrated with solemnity. The whole week is known as '**Passion Week**' (*Hasa*). There are special morning and evening services during this week. Thursday is known as **Passover** (*Pesaha*), the day of the institution of the Eucharist. **Good Friday** is the day of crucifixion and death of Jesus on the cross. The Eucharist is celebrated on the Saturday before the Easter. On Sunday, the Church celebrates the **Resurrection of Jesus Christ** (*Kemta*) with great joy. There is special Easter service before the Eucharist.

The 25th of March is observed as **Annunciation to Virgin Mary**. The church observes the **Ascension of Lord Jesus Christ**, on the fortieth day of Easter and **Pentecost** on the fiftieth day of Easter, which is the fulfillment of the promise of the sending of the Holy Spirit, to the church and the believers. Next 20-22 Sundays, till the sanctification of the church, the church meditates on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, fruits of the Holy Spirit, mission and evangelism, Apostolocity etc. through the lectionary system. June 16-29 are observed as 'the **Fast of the Apostles**' (*Sleeha Nombu*). 29th June is St. Peter's and St. Paul's Day. During these days, the church commemorates the Apostles and their missionary activities. Church emphasizes that she is sent out into the world for mission. In the Eastern church there are two feasts in commemoration of St. Thomas (*Mar Thoma Sleeha*) the Apostle of India. They are 3rd July and 21st December. The Mar Thoma Church observe the latter as the Mar Thoma Church Day (*Sabha Dinam*). August 6th is the **Feast of Transfiguration of our Lord** on the mount. The church believes that by observing this we are invited to share his glory and radiance. August 1-15 is observed as 15 days lent in connection with St. Mary and her faithful life.

It is the practice of the reformed churches to preach each Sunday based on a theme. In addition to Christological, Pneumatological, (related with the Holy Spirit) and Ecclesiological Feasts, the church also gives emphasis to mission, sacraments, social issues, church and state, ecumenism, education, witnessing through the organizations of the church etc. in the lectionary. In short we can say the lectionary of the Mar Thoma church is Eastern, Evangelical (reformed) and Ecumenical in nature. The calendar and the observance of the **Fasts**

and Feasts will help the faithful to be with Christ throughout the year and live in the experience of salvation through meditation of the word of God, confession, prayer and worship.

Liturgical Texts

Mar Thoma Church follows the Antiochene (West Syrian) liturgical tradition in her worship. The order of Holy Qurbana (Eucharistic Liturgy) was first revised and translated from Syriac into Malayalam on the basis of the reformed doctrines in 1836. Currently the church uses the following 'Orders of Holy Qurbana (also known as *Anaphora*) in the Eucharistic celebrations⁹.

1. The Anaphora of St. James,
2. The Anaphora of Mar Dionynasius Metropolitan,
3. The Anaphora of Xystus Patriarch,
4. St. Peter the Apostle,
5. Mar Yuhanon Patriarch
6. Thomas the Harclean Episcopa
7. Mar Ivanios Metropolitan.

There is a Eucharistic Order for the sick to be conducted at home. An abridged version of the Eucharistic rite is also in use.

The book of occasional offices was translated from Syriac in 1945 and contains Baptism, Matrimony, Funeral liturgy, Thanksgiving after the Child Birth, Prayer for the Sick, and the Order of Dedication of a House.

The texts of services conducted only by Bishops (Sacramentary) such as Ordination Rites, Admission to the Monastic Order, Dedication of a Church, Episcopal Consecration etc. are still in manuscript form and full translation into English is not available. There is also a special order for the Consecration of Holy Moroon (Chrism), which is used for post-baptismal anointing and dedication of a church.

Faith of the Church:

Scripture and Liturgy as a Source of Faith.

In the declaration of the constitution of the Mar Thoma Church, it is referred that 'the church is in conformity with the faith of the Christian Church in all ages, believes in Jesus Christ, God incarnate for the redemption of human kind, and in the triune God revealed by him, who is himself one in that Trinity'. It is further written that the 'Holy Bible consisting of the sixty six books comprised in the Old and New Testament, is accepted by the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian

Church as the basis of all matters of doctrine and faith. Nicene Creed, formulated in accordance with the Holy Scriptures shall in no use be altered in any manner by anyone. Likewise, the ministry of Deacon Priest and Episcopa, the rite of the church dedication, church consecration, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion (Qurbana), Holy Matrimony, Anointing the Sick, Funeral Service as well as observance of Sundays, Lents, and Dominical (Christological) Feast shall not at any time be abolished'.¹⁰

This church accepts as its goal and function: 'to be the repository of the divine doctrines revealed by Jesus Christ and proclaimed by his Apostles, to maintain these doctrines in their purity, on the spiritual life of its members through the administration of the sacraments and by the ministry of the word, to make disciples of all nations by the proclamation of the Gospel and through the administration of the Holy Baptism in the name of the triune God'.

“Scripture and Tradition (Liturgy) of the Church are the two sources of Faith of any church. When we study the history of liturgy and the formulation of the New Testament, we can see the mutual influence of both in the worship pattern and faith formulation of the church. New Testament influenced the worship of the early Christian community and the worship and liturgical practices influenced the New Testament teachings. Some of the oral traditions of the early worshipping community shaped the doctrinal proclamation of the early church. So liturgy has an authority as a source of theology. Theology should be evolved by interpreting liturgical texts along with scriptures. Such an interpretation of liturgy will contribute to the church a sound theology and authentic liturgical life”.¹¹

This chapter can be concluded by quoting Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan about the unique nature of the Mar Thoma Church.

‘The Mar Thoma Church combines evangelical and reformed doctrines with ancient form of worship and practices. As a reformed church with progressive outlook, it agrees very much with the reformed doctrines of Western Churches. Therefore in the days of ecumenism, there is much in common between the Mar Thoma Church and Reformed Churches. At the same time as it continues in the Apostolic Episcopal tradition and ancient oriental practices, it has much in common with the Orthodox Churches. Thus it is regarded by many in the ecumenical world as a bridge church’.¹²

Note:

1. Leslie Brown. *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Cambridge (1982)
2. A.M. Mundadan *History of Christianity in India* 1, (Bangalore, 1984)
3. A. A. King *The Rites of the Eastern Chritsendom II* ,(Rome, 47).P.449
4. P. Cherian *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society 1816-40*,(Kottayam, 1935), P.390-91.
5. For the details of 23 points see. K.K Kuruvila *A History of the Mar Thoma Church and its Doctrines*, (Madras, 1951) pp.15-17.
6. Juhanon Mar Thoma *Christianity in India and a Brief History of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church* (Madras, 1968) P.23.
7. Alexander Mar Thoma *The Mar Thoma Church Heritage and Mission* (Tiruvalla 1985) pp.14-38
8. George Mathew An Introduction to the Lectionary of the Mar Thoma Church *Yuvadeepam* (2002) Vol.4, pp.14-15
9. George Mathew 'Mar Thoma Worship' in Paul Bradshaw(ed) *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*. (SCM London 2002) pp.295-96
10. See 'Declaration' in the Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church (Tiruvalla, 1984) P.12
11. George Mathew Liturgy for the 21st Century in P.J. Alexander,(ed) *Mar Thoma Church Tradition and Modernity*,(Tiruvalla, 2000) p.118
12. Alexander Mar Thoma op.cit. p.93

II

THE THEOLOGY OF SACRAMENTS: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

Sacraments are the rite or enactment of worship and sanctification of the church. In our encounter with God, Jesus-the Word of God-who became man and sacrificed himself is the ultimate Sacrament of God (Heb.1:1-3). In Christ we see the protective love and mercy of God. Through the Sacraments God's mercy and grace come down to human beings in all their walks of life. Life-situations are lifted to God, through Sacraments. As a result, Christ has ordered and the church has traditionally followed these sacraments and handed them down to the believers as gifts, as the means to that end. The churches in general have recognized seven Sacraments; viz.-Holy Baptism, Confirmation (Anointing the Holy Moroon), Confession, Holy Communion, Holy Matrimony, Ordination and Anointing the sick. The purpose of this book is to assess the extent of the development and growth of the Sacraments on the basis of the Bible, History and Traditions of the church. In this chapter a historical evaluation is discussed in detail.

The word 'Sacrament'

According to the traditions different churches have used different words to convey the meaning of sacraments. But either they have been used to mean the same thing or they were complimentary to each other, for example, in Greek the word used is '*Mysterion*' and in Latin it is '*Sacramentum*'. In Malayalam it is '*Rahasyam*', '*Marmam*', in English it is mystery and in Syriac it is '*Rosso*'. The analytical study of these words will help us to understand the historical background.

The word '*Koodasa*' in Syriac is derived from the word '*Kadesh*'. It means cleansing, purifying or sanctifying: it is also used in the sense of setting apart because of the sharing in the Holiness of God. The word '*Rosso*' in Syriac can be translated as '*Rahasyam*' or '*Marmam*' in Malayalam.¹

The '*Mysterion*' in Greek means that which is hidden or secret. In mystery religions the rites prescribed to be confidential are called '*Mystery*'². This is some confidentiality imparted at the point of initiation. It is believed that this will lead them to salvation. As a means to salvation Sacraments are described as '*Rahasyam*', and '*Marmam*' in Malayalam. Oriental Churches call Sacraments as '*Rahasyam*' because it is not easily comprehensible for the human faculties.

But Sacraments are divine secrets already revealed- divulged- they are not hidden. This is what St. Paul means when he describes God's plan of salvation as '*Mystery*' of His will, made known to us through Christ. (Eph. 1:9, 1Cor. 2:1, Col.2:2)

Sacramentum

This Latin word has different shades of meaning. It is made up of two words:- '*Sacre*' and '*Mentum*'. It can be the means of Sanctification. That is, the method of cleansing. The same word was used by the Roman soldiers at the time of their swearing in. The declaration that 'I renounce Satan and I believe in the Messiah' at the time of Baptism, in the early Church was a, reaffirmation of their faith in Christ. In that sense, the word Sacrament was used from that time onwards. Since the word '*Mysterion*' had association with mystery religions, Fathers of the church like Tertullian preferred the word '*Sacramentum*'.³

What is meant by Sacrament?

The believers of the Early Church were enthusiastic about the living presence of Jesus in their midst. However they were not concerned about the connection between sacraments and their relation with God, or with the presence of Christ. But they attached more importance to the emotional bond and the experience of happiness that they derived from it. Therefore the word '*Sacrament*' did not figure in their thoughts to get any proper definition.

To sum up, Sacrament has two objectives:-

1. The secrets of Jesus salvation and his methods which were shrouded in the ancient past to be brought alive.

2. To give a new divine life to the participants who are already sanctified and blessed by the Holy Spirit.⁴ The Eastern churches believe that the Holy Spirit is instrumental in bringing about the above experience.

Sacraments in the New Testament

In the original text of New Testament the word '*Mysterion*' has been used thirty times. God in his magnanimity has decided to unite in Christ, retrieve and renew everything and everybody. St. Paul has described this process as '*Mysterion*' (Eph. 1:9, 3:3-9). Now this mystery is revealed through the Gospel. This act of God has led us from death to life and from slavery to freedom. This is where Sacraments come into play in the plan of God's salvation for humankind.

Sacraments in the Epistles

In the book of Acts and Epistles particularly of St. Paul, there are several references to sacraments. Baptism and Holy Communion are the two Sacraments directly commanded by Christ and clearly evidenced by the gospels and the Epistles. These are therefore referred to as '*Dominical Sacraments*' among the reformed churches. Let us see the above Sacraments in the backdrop of the New Testament.

Sacraments have played a very important role in the life of the Early churches. There is mention about Baptism in the following verses- Romans 6, 1 Cor. 1:13-17, Acts 2:41, 8: 12, 38, 9:18, 10:48. There are several references about celebrating Holy Communion in the Epistles of St. Paul. 1 Cor. 11: 20-21 Acts 2:42-46, 20:7. Baptism and Holy Communion have been practised from the early days of the Church. The Epistles of St. Paul were written before the Gospels (AD 51-67). He mentions in the I Cor. that these two sacraments as strongly entrusted practices in the churches. According to him Baptism is the death of the sinful person, just like the death of Jesus, resulting in a new resurrected life (Rom. 6: 5-7). Just as partaking in the Holy Communion it is also necessary to accept baptism as our readiness to suffer with Jesus. The baptism is nothing but death, burial and resurrection through Jesus Christ. Baptism and Holy Communion declare the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that is the way that the believers become one with Him (I Cor: 11: 26). If the people of Israel celebrate the Passover as the day of their deliverance, for Christians Jesus Christ is the Passover which believers celebrate as their symbol of salvation (I Cor. 5:7).⁵

Sacraments in the Gospels

According to St. Mathew, Christ had directly commanded to baptize the believers. The risen Christ commanded his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, which I have commanded You” (Mathew 28.18-20). That means the church is bound to follow the Sacraments established by Christ.

Just like the other gospels St.Mathew also has recorded the importance of Holy Communion (St.Mathew 26: 26-29). In the order of worship due importance has been given to this passage as the starting point of the Holy Communion. It is argued by some people, that it is the verses that give validity to the sacrament of Holy Communion. The church that follows the directions of Jesus Christ unconditionally continues to do so even today. This is the medium through which we experience the presence of Christ.

In St. Mark’s Gospel, the corresponding reference is found in 16:15-16.

In the gospel of St.Luke and in the book of Acts there are references to the establishment of Baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism is the Sacrament that brings you into the fold of Christian community. The Holy Communion is the permanent source of nurture and experience. According to Acts 2: 38, repentance is an inner experience that should occur in the hearts of the believers. Baptism is the manifestation of that repentance in the community. This is how we receive the gift from God in the form of Holy Spirit. Breaking the bread is a regular feature of that community life. It is to the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we continue the Sacramental practice even today (Luke 24: 30, 35, Acts 20:7,11, 2:42).⁶ What is given in Acts 2 is a clear indication of the life and worship of the earlier Christian community- Prayer, ‘Breaking of Bread’ and sharing of the material things-were the hallmarks of the Early Church.

Sacraments according St. John

St. John’s Gospel was written at a comparatively later stage. Some say it was for the second generation of believers. St.John does not directly deal with Baptism and Holy Communion. However there are symbolic references to these two sacraments. For example in St.John 3:3-8 Jesus tells Nicodemus, “I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Like wise in Ch. 6 Jesus said that he is the bread of life.

In the opinion of St. Paul, the faith and sacraments indicate our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Holy Communion and Baptism are the remembrance and declaration of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. According to St. John, Christ came from heaven and he is destined to go back to heaven (John 3:13). Crucifixion is the honor of Jesus' glorification (John 17:1). Some Fathers of the oriental church believe that the blood that flowed from the wounds of Jesus on the cross, is the symbol of the Holy Communion and the water that flowed with it is the symbol of Baptism.

Through his incarnation Jesus identified himself with humanity through the medium of baptism. After crucifixion and burial he resurrected and ascended back to his Father in heaven. Through baptism the believers also pass through the same experience. The whole of his life was as a Eucharist (thanksgiving) in front of God. Jesus came down as bread of life, gave life to the people and glorified God the Father (John. 6:18). His life was a revelation of God to the world (John 1:18). In John's view Sacraments come from above and they prepare us to have deep interaction with God.

Development of Sacraments in the History of the Church

The development of the process of Sacraments from time to time has not been recorded chronologically by any one. The emphasis of the church was not on these points. Until the 12th Century, about the accepted number of Sacraments there was no unanimity.

We have already seen that the Holy Communion and Baptism were in existence from the early days of the church and that they had been mentioned in the New Testament. It is not possible to say that all these seven Sacraments and their rites were directly established by Christ. The correct view seems to be that Christ was the foundation on which everything was built. With some effort it may be possible to unravel the mystery of the Sacraments as Jesus saw them. But Sacraments are the seven channels from the river of grace that sprang from Christ. They are the means to an end and means of grace.⁷ There was not much dispute in the Eastern churches about the number of Sacraments, it is accepted by all churches that there are seven Sacraments.

Baptism and Holy Communion are Sacraments supported by the Biblical records. It can be seen that for worship service of the church, special directions were given from the time of the Apostles (Act 6:1, 1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:16). Remission of sins is a power granted to the church by Jesus. The burden of human sin has been placed on the

shoulders of Christ-the Lamb. The same kind of worship service is done by the Church even today⁸ (John 1:29,36, 20:23). In the Early Church, confirmation was also administered with baptism and blessing through laying on of hands and prayer. It is believed that through the above process the power of the Holy Spirit descended on them (2 Cor1: 21, Eph 4:13). The praying for the sick is an extension of the practice prescribed by Christ. (Mathew 10: 1, 6:13, James 5:14). In view of the positive attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament, the oriental churches have accepted Holy Matrimony also as a sacrament (Gen. 2: 18-24, Mathew 19:4-6, Eph. 5: 24).

During the first four centuries according to the recorded evidence, there were developments of different types of prayers, practices and customs. Bible reading, initiation into the church, declaration of faith, baptism, anointing, celebration of Holy Communion and participation in it were the important events. All these sacraments were connected with the all-pervading Savior that is Christ. Even though in the later days there were different approaches to the fruitfulness of Sacraments and their relevance in Christian life, their Christo-centric position was always accepted. During the 16th Century, Trent Council confirmed that there are seven sacraments established by Christ⁹. After the Apostolic times the history of the theology of Sacraments can be divided into four periods. These four divisions are dealt with in the following section.¹⁰

Period of Augustine (A.D. 430)

Augustine did not prepare a systematic theology on Sacraments. But he laid the foundation for its later developments. He has expounded four principles on Sacraments:¹¹

1. Sacraments are sacred signs and through them we receive invisible grace.
2. There are two components in Sacraments, the material component and the verbal component on consecration.
3. Certain sacraments are not repeated in one's life:- eg: baptism and ordination.
4. Since the sacraments are conducted in the name of Jesus any deficiency on the part of the performer will not be an obstacle for the full flow of blessings from God. (This has been questioned during the 16th Century by reformers of the church). Sacraments become fruitful because of the role played by the Son and Holy Spirit in them. This added some importance to the practice of sacraments in the community.

Middle Ages (A.D. 1100 -1300)

The early part of this period was very complex. People got attracted to Augustine's theology of Sacraments. Some people by quoting Augustine out of context made the position even more complex. In the Western schools and Universities, Sacraments were prescribed as subjects for studies. Many misconceptions and wrong teachings crept into the Western churches. It was at this time that the number of Sacraments was fixed at seven. The Church taught that some other forms of prayer, though sacramental in nature, were not exactly Sacraments. After baptism, confirmation and ordination the candidate should live a dignified life, befitting their position in the community, leading them in worship and service. This was the exhortation of the Church.

Lot of changes took place during the life time of Thomas Aquinas. The theology of Sacraments underwent many changes. He taught that the Sacraments are instruments to bring grace and deliver it to the believers, as ordained by God the Father.

Period of Reformation

During this period, though the theology of Sacraments grew considerably in stature, there were some deviations from the central doctrine as propounded by the official version. The Sacraments often degenerated from their spiritual status to become meaningless practices. By excluding the role of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament, they were reduced to mechanical rituals.

At this juncture new theologians entered the fray and criticized the church for the undesirable deviations from the true paths in conducting the Sacraments. They reiterated the strong link between faith and Sacrament and the place of Word of God.¹² This group of reformers led by Martin Luther, Swingli and others felt the need to simplify the procedure and add substance to the core of Sacrament so that the participants would get personal experience of the remission of sins and God's grace. They argued that there are only two Sacraments that have clear foundation as given in the Bible and that they are Holy Communion and Baptism. Luther taught Sacraments are like the bridge or the ladder by which the Holy Spirit reaches us. He concluded that these two sacraments are founded by God and they bring God's grace to us. Swingli advised that we should take Sacraments as triggering agents of the Holy Spirit that bring to us the remembrance of Jesus.¹³

As a sequel to the new ideas set out by the Protestants, the Catholic Church in the Council of Trent (1545-62) took up the study of Sacraments. Even though there are no clear indications in the Bible, they said, the fact is that there are seven sacraments accepted by the church. According to the teachings of the church Sacraments are not just instruments to activate our weak faith. They are really electrifying agencies that give grace and new life to the recipients. The Catholic Church did not endorse the Protestant view of degrading Sacraments and giving over emphasis to the verses in the Bible. They stick to the old school of thought that the Sacraments are given to us by God to sanctify us and to renew our faith in Him.

Modern Age

During the Middle Ages and even later there was no proper understanding about the relation between the church and the Sacraments. Instead of seeing Sacraments as bright spots in the process of worship some people considered them as mere rituals. The existing theology had not delved into the depth of the relation between sacrament and the community of believers. This was set right only in the 20th Century with its new trend of ideas. A doctrine of the church with Holy Spirit as its centre took shape and resulted in an in-depth study of the relevance of Sacraments vis-à-vis the church (Ecclesiology).¹⁴

The exhortation of the 20th Century theologians was 'go back to the source'. They emphasized the importance of the actual participation of worshippers in the process of community worship. The Christ events were brought out through the liturgy in the church. They concluded that Christians even today experience the mystery of Christ, through the sacrament with a renewed vigor. They emphasized that Sacraments must be placed on a firm footing in the life of the church. It is the western churches that gave impetus to this idea. The documents of the Second Vatican Council have recorded the following about Sacraments. "They sanctify people, nurture and nourish the body of Christ (church) above all offer worship to God- these are the aims of Sacraments. Since they are symbols they have got deeper demonstrative values. Besides, having faith in Sacraments, the elements used in the process should be inspiring enough to increase the faith and to make it ardent. So these are called the Sacraments of faith".¹⁵

Sacraments and the Church

As the community of believers the church itself is a Sacrament through which God acts and reveals his plans to invite all the people

into the faith. The church through its services is leading the world to the final unity and reconciliation to the experience of the kingdom of God. The church is a symbol of unity and its cause. Through Sacraments the church accomplishes that. Sacraments are the media of church's action and through them the church achieves self-realization and self-revelation.

The elements of Sacraments are not mere material things, they create the opportunity for the personal experience of the presence of God. They are not rituals but they are eventful chapters in the history of salvation.

Sacraments and Mission

Sacraments are the divine dispensations, which prepare the believers for achieving blessings and grace through Christ. Through the worship of the believers and symbolic practices of the church, God's grace reaches the believers.

Through Sacraments an individual realizes God's loving presence and through the worship he responds to it. We individually and collectively express our faith through Sacraments with the help of the Holy Spirit. Christ gathers his followers, to be sent out as the spoke persons of God's love. They are shaped and fortified by Sacraments before they are sent out on their mission. The believers get prepared for worship and service with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Sacraments have a necessary role to play in all critical situations in our lives. We feel safe in the hands of our protective God. God accepts our decisions and transforms them into useful services to God and humankind.

The individual who is baptized is ensconced in the protective love of God. Confirmation fills the candidate with the Holy Spirit and he grows as a disciple of Christ. Confession gives him absolution of sins and deliverance from the feeling of guilt. The sick and the old find solace and friendship of Christ in the rites. Maturity in the service of God is attained by ordination. Marriage vows enable the couple to love and trust each other till the very end of their lives.

Through the Holy communion the believers experience the presence and fellowship of Jesus in their lives. Thus the Sacraments enrich the lives of people individually and collectively in all walks of life and act as a catalyst to bring God's grace and make them witness in the name of Jesus.

Note:

1. George Mathew *A study of the Sacrament and Worship of the Church*, MTYS (Tiruvalla, 1995) (Malayalam) P.1
2. J.Kallarangattu *Sacramental Theology - Introduction*(Mal,) OIRSI(Vadavathoor), 1993, P.9
3. Philippe Beguire(ed) *How to understand Sacraments*, SCM, (London, 1991) pp.56 ff.
4. Jose Maniparambil *Sacraments*, (Aalur, 1995) p.20
5. Philippe Beguire(ed) *How to understand Sacraments*, p.19
6. Ibid p.21.
7. J Kallarangattu pp.51,53.
8. George Mathew pp.13,14.
9. J Kallarangattu p.55.
10. Ibid p.27 ff.
11. M.J Taylor *The Sacraments*, Alba, (Newyork, 1981), p.21ff.
12. *New Dictionary of Theology*. SCM, (London,) pp.916,17.
13. M.J Taylor p.21.
14. J. Kallarangattu pp.35-37.
15. Second Vatican Council Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, 59.

III

HOLY BAPTISM

(Mammodisa)

Baptism and Holy Communion are the two Sacraments, which were directly established and ordered by Christ. So these are strictly followed by all the churches and they are called 'Dominical Sacraments.' Baptism is inextricably bound with the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is actually a reflection of the death of the sinful human being with Christ and the resurrection thereafter, resulting in the union with the body of Christ, viz. the church. It is a sacrament performed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and it is a gift from God. Through this sacrament God enters into a new covenant with his people.

Biblical Basis

The basis of baptism is found in the directions given by Jesus (St. Mathew 28: 17-20). Also there are indications about this in the Old Testament. Among the Jews there was a tradition of washing, before entering the house. Circumcision was a must among the Jews. In addition to this the non-Jews had to undergo baptism and perform sacrifice to become members of the Jewish Community. The direction given to the disciples by Christ about baptism is found in St. Mathew 28: 19-20. "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". In the Book of Acts and in the Epistle of St. Paul there are indications that Baptism was universally practised in the early churches (Acts 2:38, 41, 9:19). It is also noticed that references have been made about

baptism in the Bible, order of baptism liturgy, and in the writings of the church Fathers. Baptism is identification with the death of Christ and His resurrection (Romans 6: 3-5, Col. 2:12). According to I Cor. 6:11 baptism is washing away of the sins; according to John 3:5 it is the second birth. In Eph. 5:14 baptism is described as awakening and enlightenment by Christ. Gal. 3:27 says, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”. As per 1Cor. 10:1,2 baptism is deliverance from slavery to freedom. In Gal. 3:28 it is described as transformation of human in to a new entity untouched by any discrimination of status. As stated in Titus 3:5 baptism brings about a rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit resulting in our salvation.

What is Baptism?

We have seen that Baptism is strongly connected with the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Through Baptism a person dies with Christ in sin, resurrects and joins the holy church and becomes one with Him. The Sacrament of baptism is performed in the name of the holy Trinity. The word ‘*Mamodisa*’ is derived from the Syriac word ‘*Omedh*’. In Greek, the equivalent word is ‘*Baptisso*’ which means sprinkling, immerse, wash or bath etc.

Baptism by John the Baptist.

The purpose of baptism by John the Baptist was to make people confess their sins and repent for them. (Mathew 3: 12, Luke 3: 8, 16). His aim was to prepare people for a new life in the kingdom of God and into the new Era of Jesus Christ. He was guiding people into Jesus.

Baptism of Christ by John the Baptist

Jesus who knew no sin volunteered to suffer death for the sins of humankind. Jesus identified himself with sinners and loved them. The baptism that he received from John the Baptist points to this identification, that Jesus made with the sinners (Mathew 3: 13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21, 22, John 1:32-34). Jesus brought about a new covenant amidst the people. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, he tried to deter Him. John said, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me”? Jesus replied and said, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness”. Then John consented (Mathew 3:14,15). It is not the same baptism that the church now performs. But it is according to what Jesus directed (Mathew 28: 18-20, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:15,16, John 3:5,6). Christian baptism is the rebirth

through the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him and a voice from heaven said, “This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Mathew 3:16,17). Likewise in every Sacrament of baptism the candidates become God’s children (1 John 3:1).

In the documents of the Commission of Faith and Order on Baptism it has been described as follows: -¹

1. Participation with Christ in His death and resurrection:

Baptism is identification and participation of the candidate with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom.6:1-6). Christians immerse themselves in the liberating death of Christ; They are baptized into Christ Jesus and also baptized into his death.” Just as, Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:1-6). The result is our ‘Old person’ was crucified with him that the body of sin was done away with.

2. Repentance, Remission of Sin and Cleansing.

In the mystery of death and resurrection of Christ contain repentance and a change of the heart. Those who are baptized obtain remission of sins and cleansing through Christ (1Cor.6: 11). They are washed, sanctified and fortified by the Holy Spirit to enter into a new divine life.

3. The gift of Holy Spirit.

Through Baptism and confirmation the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believers. With these the Almighty gives this gift of Holy Spirit to every believer. The hearts of the believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit confirming them as the heir of the son’s heritage. They become the children of God.

4. Incorporation into the Body of Christ i.e., the Church

Baptism is the sign and seal of our discipleship of Christ. Through Baptism believers enter into a bond with Christ and also among the fellow beings and they also join the Universal church (Gal.3:26-28). Baptism brings a common characteristic, gives them a tie-up in their faith. To witness Christ and minister to the needy are the mission entrusted to the Christians (Eph 4:4-6). The Union with Christ affirms the unity of the spirit, through the bond of peace and asserts that there is only one body and one spirit, one Lord, one faith and one baptism and one God as Father of all.

5. The signs of the kingdom of God

Baptism is the sign of the kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come. We are looking forward for the day when each person would declare that Jesus is the savior of humankind. Baptism makes life meaningfully vibrant, in all fields of life. It also brings us into the sphere of activity of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is a gift of God and the response of people to that gift. (Eph 4:13). It is an invitation to humankind to grow in stature like Jesus. The personal conviction of the believers is a must for becoming responsible members in the church which is the body of Christ. Baptism leads us to a life of reconciliation.

Structure of the Baptismal Liturgy.

The following is the structure of the Baptismal Liturgy of the Churches which follow the Antiochene Liturgical tradition.²

Opening prayer. This is a prayer to God to make the believers and the priest worthy to the service of the Baptism as directed by Christ and observed by the church through the Apostles. There is a continuation of prayer for the blessings of God for the candidates. Then Psalm 23 is read. Then in a short prayer (*Ekba*) it is pleaded that the believers be sealed with God's grace just like the lintels and doorposts of the houses of Israelites were marked with the passover blood, so that the believers are spared from sins like the "Jews were saved from the destroyer" (Exo.12:23).

Introductory Prayer

In this prayer it is stated that it is the divine dispensation of God that his flock should be baptized, and that Jesus deserves honour and praise on that account. In '*Sedra*' (long prayer) the theology of Baptism is brought out. In the early part of this prayer the saving grace of Jesus is described. Later on Baptism in all its connotation is explained. This prayer needs detailed study.

a. A Narration of the salvific act of Christ

In this supplication to Jesus a list of activities that Jesus adopted to give his followers is given. They are:-

- Collecting together the Diaspora community scattered by their own sins.
- Inviting humankind to observe his covenants.
- Gathering his flock under one fold.

- Attracting his followers to the spring of life and to the main stream of salvation.
- Advising them to cleanse themselves by washing out all their evil thoughts. After citing these examples the feeling of security offered by Baptism is sought to be bestowed on the candidates.

What happens through Baptism (The effect of Baptism)

The experiences obtained by the candidates are enumerated:-

1. They are enlivened with a new vigor in Christ.
2. The candidates are initiated into God's flock and counted as one among them.
3. The divine grace of God is reflected in the candidates.
4. They become fit for a new life.
5. They become the children of God.

It is clarified that Baptism helps the candidates to renounce the old habits and to obtain the unique experience of the fullness of life in Christ. After the hymn there is a prayer by which it is made clear that the church expects that the candidate to be set apart for eternal life and heir to the house of God, by living a life ordained by God, through Baptism.

The Scripture Reading

Here the Deacon reads the passage from the Epistle to Romans 5th Chapter verse 20 to the end and 6th Chapter 1-8. What we understand is a new insight about the meaning of Baptism. This is stated in Romans 6: 3,4, stating that we were baptized into his death and buried with him and that just as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

St. Luke's Gospel Ch. 3: 15, 16 and St. Johns Gospel Ch. 3:5, 6 are read, by the priest. Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit" John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Jesus said, "Unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." St. John 3:5. The word 'Born again' is derived from the 'Anathon' in Greek, meaning 'being born from above' 'Reborn' by Holy Spirit. Water fire and dove are the symbols of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38,39). Being born of water and fire are not two separate

incidents, but they are one and the same happening simultaneously—one visible and the other invisible Gen 1:2. This is an act of creation.³

Enrolment in the Baptism Register

In some Eastern Churches there is a special prayer before entering the candidate's name in the Baptism register. This is not found in the Mar Thoma prayer book. The prayer is as follows: -“Lord, you have led your child into wisdom and light from darkness and the wretched ways by your divine call. Please enter his name in the Book of life” (Order of Baptism, [Pampakkuda] Page 19). Then the names of the candidate, the God- Father and of the priest are entered in the register.

Writing the name of the candidate in the register is equivalent to writing it in the Book of life, (Phi. 4:3, Rev. 3:5, 13:18) according to John Chrysostom. This book is compared to the Heavenly Book by Theodore of Mopsusia, one of the Fathers of the church. In the early church, the candidate was named at the time of Baptism. This was indicative of a new birth and new life. Now a days the name is decided earlier than the ceremony. This is not in accordance with the tradition of the church. Enrolling the name symbolizes that the candidate has become a committed Christian.

Breathing on the Candidate (Blowing)

After writing the name in the register, the priest says a prayer and breathes a sign of cross on the candidate. It says “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John-20:22) and continues to pray that the candidate may be prepared to receive the Holy Spirit and renounce idol worship for ever (*Order of Pampakkuda PP.19, 21*).

This prayer is not found in the Mar Thoma prayer book. But at the time of the ordination of the priests in our church, while reading the Gospel this practice is followed.

Consignation

The priest, without ‘*Muroon*’ (Holy Oil) draws the sign of the cross on the candidate and says,” In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (mentions the name) you are sealed.” The candidate is recognized as a member of the church by this seal. The sign of the cross is a mark of salvation and recognition. The seal declares that the candidate is set apart for God's work. It is a special mark of identification. The candidate becomes one with Christ with this ceremony (Exo. 12:7-14, 2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13,14, 4:30). The sign of the cross makes the candidate one with Christ.

Exorcism

A prayer for the deliverance of the candidate from the influence and slavery of Satan is the next step. The prayer follows like this, "O! Lord cast out all the wicked dealings of the evil one from this creation and handiwork, who has been sealed in your holy name. Rebuke the rebellious traitor, cleanse him/her from the spirit of deceit. May he/she not be the dwelling place of Satan but the sanctuary of God.

The candidate is thus saved from the clutches of Satan and his evil designs. The church is declaring that the evil has no domain or influence on this candidate. Jesus Christ in his ministry has commanded the demons to leave their victims and trouble them no more (Mark 9: 14-32, Luke 8:26-29). Through the Sacrament of Baptism it is made known that the candidate is a free agent in Christ and a citizen of Heaven (Eph. 6:12,13). It does not mean that before baptism all are under the influence of Satan; it simply means that God has led us from darkness to light and taken us into his own heritage (Col. 1:13).

Renouncing Satan

The god-father/mother and the parents of the child repeat three times the declaration, "I renounce Satan". This is done holding the left hand of the candidate because it is presumed that left represents evil (Mathew 25:41). The god-father/mother announces this declaration on behalf of the candidate (if he/she is a child).

Adhering to Christ.

The god-father/mother on behalf of the candidate surrenders himself to Christ in his faith and holding the right hand, the promise is made that all the teachings imparted to the church by the prophets, saints and others, through Christ, are accepted by the candidate. This is the time when the faith and submission to Christ are proclaimed. Then the Nicene Creed and articles of faith are recited by the candidate or the mediators.⁴

Role of God father/Mother or Sponsors

In the earlier centuries it was the sponsors who introduced the believers to the leaders of the church. The god-fathers/mothers gave testimony to the good intentions and integrity of the candidates. They are bound to pay special attention to the spiritual growth of the candidate. The god-father acts like a spiritual guide, teacher and advisor to the candidate. He should teach the candidate the true belief and groom him in the faith. Those who bring the candidate to the

church and all those present there, are deemed to be mediators. The statement in the new book on Baptism that ‘candidates above 14 years need not have a god- father is not correct’ according to church traditions. For it is fit and proper to have somebody representing the church, to receive them and to help them as a guide for their spiritual growth. After the service the parents, god- fathers and others are given instructions by church as follows: -

“When the child is growing up, it is your duty to see that he/she grows up in Christian faith and in the teachings of the church. You must set an example to him to follow. Your family life should be such as to inspire confidence and faith in them. By the time, the child becomes major he must be in a position to publicly declare his acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah”.

This matter of great responsibility has now degenerated into farce these days. It is not proper for persons of unproved Christian life to take up this responsibility. Only such people who identify themselves with the Church, and its beliefs should be allowed to officiate as god-parents. They represent the church and those present on this occasion.

Pre- baptismal Anointing

The minister applies the ‘*Sythe*’ (Olive Oil) on the forehead of the candidate by drawing a sign of the cross and says, “ as a token of being born anew as a child of God (name) is sealed with holy oil in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

The significance of applying olive oil is to convert a wild olive tree into a fruitful olive tree by the process of grafting (Rom. 11: 17-24). Olive is the symbol of salvation even in the old testament. For example

1. After the deluge in Noah’s time a dove brings in olive leaves to the Ark of Noah (Gen. 8:11).
2. The devotees of God are described as green olive trees in the house of God (Psalm 52:8). The children of God-fearing people are compared to the olive plants around the table (Psalm 128:3). These show the dependence on God and living with Him etc. are the part of the vision of salvation of the Eastern Churches. It also indicates the healing process for the sick. In Psalm 45:7 the olive oil is described as oil of gladness that imparts scent to one’s garments.

The purpose of anointing is described in the prayer just before it.

“Lord by sending your Holy Spirit, out of nothing you have created

this child as a living being and by your love you have made him/her worthy of Holy Baptism. O Lord build him upon foundation of the Holy Apostles. Plant him/her to grow and to flourish in your church. Make him opened to the mystery of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Perfect him/her with your divine gifts. They may be kindled with your light and be free from the bondage of sin”(Order of Service P. 17).

The sign of the cross worn by us on our foreheads makes us one with God. This is an opportunity for us to declare our faith in God. It is a declaration of freedom from all bondages. This signifies our union with Christ.

Blessing of the Water

The minister mixes cold and hot water in the Baptistry and says a prayer. Water is considered to be a cleansing agent all through the Bible (Lev. 15:5, 16: 24, 25, Esk. 36:25, Zec. 13:1). It is observed that the spirit of God has been working on the surface of water from the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:2) There is reference to clean and still water in Psalm 23. At the time of the baptism of Christ, the Holy Spirit descended on the waters of river Jordan as a dove (Luke 3:21, 22). Jesus taught us that we should be born by water and spirit. Through the sacrament of Baptism the church is making a collective supplication for the sanctification of the water used through the Holy Spirit, for the renewal of life and new birth of the candidate.

“O Lord accept our humble prayers by the mercies, grace and love for humankind of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, and sanctify this water. O Lord, you have given us the fountain that truly cleanses us from all the defilements of sin. As you are the one who saves us, washes us clean and grants all good gifts, we offer praise and thanksgiving to you and to your only Son and to the Holy Spirit”(Order of Service P 17).

The mixture of hot and cold water used in the ceremony represents the Holy Spirit. “He will baptize you in spirit and fire (Luke 3:15 , 16). Hot water represents fire and spirit. It is to be recollected the statement of Christ that” we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we pass through water and spirit’ (John 3:5, 6). Heat stands for energy and life. The rebirth through water and spirit is done through baptism. Water is the source of life. The presence of Holy Spirit is brought about in the water by the breathing of the minister into it. The minister doing this three times.

Lord, 'The breath that you bestowed on your disciples may be transferred, may be given to us also. This is reminiscent of Jesus ordering (John 20:22) his disciples to receive the Holy Spirit.

Adam was created by God by breathing in to his nose (Gen.2: 7). That breath gave him life. Since Baptism is the second birth, the same procedure as before, is repeated. Likewise the minister blows in the baptismal water in remembrance of the above incidents. In some oriental churches this prayer is left out. There are different versions of this prayer in the books of different churches. This is not found in the Mar Thoma Order of Service.

Pouring of Mooron into the Baptismal Water

After making the sign of the cross in the water, the minister pour drops of *mooron* into the water. He says, "we pour the holy oil (*mooron*) into the water". This represents the act of the Holy Spirit that worked on the surface of water at creation (Gen-1: 2). All sacraments are sanctified and made perfect by the Holy Spirit. Prayer for the continuous presence of the Holy Spirit is found in all the prayer books of the churches of the Antiochene traditions.

The '*mooron*' is poured in to the water to bring in the presence of the Holy Spirit. *Mooron* is the Symbol of the Holy Spirit in Syriac traditions. Since the new birth is from water and spirit *mooron* is added as a catalyst.⁵

Baptism

The minister places his right hand on the forehead of the child and keeps the child facing east in the baptistery dips the child in the water, mentions the name and says, "is baptized in the hope of the remission of sins and eternal life in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit". The chief celebrant is the triune God. So in the oriental churches the passive voice is used "The child is being baptized". This is a proclamation (Announcement)

In the above prayer the following points are made clear:-

Baptism sanctifies a person he /she becomes a member of the family of Christ and gets a renewed vigor, he/she is filled with grace. The prayer also includes pleading for sanctification, deliverance from bondage, remission of sins, forgiveness of trespasses, right of God's grace, imperishable garments, newness of the Holy Spirit, identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the new experience derived from Baptism.

Note:

1. *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No.111 (WCC, Geneva,1982)pp.2,3.
2. See Holy Baptism and Chrismation in the Mar Thoma Syrian Church *Order of Services*(Tiruvalla, 1988)pp.9-23.
3. Cherian Thomas and C.A Abraham(eds) *A Study of the Sacraments* (Mal), (Tiruvalla, 1995) p.47.
4. B.Varghese Holy Baptism. PUROHITHAN, Vol.X,3 (1993) pp.11-30
5. Ibid p. 26.

IV

ANOINTING THE HOLY MOORON (Chrismation)

Anointing the Holy Mooron (Chrismation) is a sacrament established in the church to keep the believer firmly in the faith and to make a real Christian, with special help and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. '*Mooron*' the Greek word means oil, ointment or scent. In the oriental churches after baptism, '*Mooron*' is applied on the forehead and other parts of the body of the candidate. *Mooron* is also used to sanctify the water used for baptism, the new church buildings and the altar table (tabaleetha) used for the Holy Communion.

Biblical Basis

In the Old Testament there are references that the prophets, kings and the priests were being anointed with *Mooron*. This oil is supposed to be used for anointment. Likewise the priests were also anointed (Exo. 30:30, 29:7, Lev. 8:12, Numbers 3:3). Same way the kings were also anointed (1 Samuel 10:1, 16:13). Through the same process, King David was filled with the spirit of God. Even the prophets were receiving the Holy Spirit by anointing (1 Kings 19:16, Isa. 61:1)

God had ordered Moses to use anointing oil and sweet incense to sanctify the Tabernacle the Ark of the Testimony and all the furniture and the utensils used in the altar for worship. A new church building and the articles are sanctified with the moroon (Exo. 30: 22-25).

In the old Testament there are three types of anointments similar to that which Christ had received. Christ is ordained and anointed by God. In the river Jordan John the Baptist anointed him (Mathew 3;

13-17, Mark 1: 9-11, Luke 3: 21, 22). In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus read out the passage from the Old Testament, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). The anointment of Christ, is passed on to the believers through ‘*Mooron*’ in baptism. Just like the believers partake in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through anointment of *Mooron*, the candidate also gets the benefit of the anointment of Christ.¹

Either the apostles or their messengers used to lay their hands and pray for the candidates who received the spirit of God (Acts 8:17). It is recorded here that the Holy Spirit descended on them after the baptism (Acts 8:16, 17, 18, 19:5,6). In the case of St. Paul, this happened before his baptism (Acts 9: 17, 18). Later *Mooron* was used instead of laying on of hands. After the time of the apostles, the Bishops used to set apart sanctified ‘*Mooron*’ for the candidate after baptism. That is to say they did away with the earlier practice of individual laying on of hands on the candidates. It is the new practice that the oriental Churches now follows.² In the western liturgical tradition baptism is done during infancy and after some years (12-14), the head of the Church does the laying on of hands of the candidates and confirms them. CSI, C.N.I and Lutheran Churches follow this practice. This is called Confirmation.

Explanation of the service of the anointment with ‘*Mooron*’

The anointment with ‘*Mooron*’ signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit, received by those who are baptized. The minister reads from the prayer book as follows:-

“(Name) is anointed with the holy oil as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit given to true believers. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”³

It is a fulfillment of the promised new life, in the name of Son and the Holy Spirit. The anointment with *Mooron* is an instrument triggering the growth of the grace, received by the candidate. The prayer is for help in bearing spiritual fruits as a result of baptism. Metaphorically ‘*Mooron*’ stands for the sweets smelling fragrance of Christ.

The spirit of God enters the believers through anointment and plays its part. St. Paul says that it is indicative of the heritage passed on to the candidates (Rom 8:15,16). Anointment with *Mooron* can be regarded as a gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts. 10:45). Through it our body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19, Rom 8:11, 2Timo.

1:4). As a result the believers take on the spirit of Christ (Rom 13:14 Gal 3:27). This is an entry to the royal priesthood. With this we attain the status of royalty and membership of a holy Community (Exo. 19:6, 1 Pet. 2:9). This results in the culmination of new robes followed by crowning, proclaiming a new status. The prayer is as follows:- “O ! Lord adorn your servants the crown of the radiance and the glory of your Holy name. May his/her life be subject to your sovereignty and reflect the glory of your majesty. My he/she show forth the grace of sonship, be adorned with the crown of glory, and be worthy to offer praise and thanksgiving...forever”(Order of service P 21,22).

With this sacrament the grace of the Holy Spirit is conferred on the candidate. The effect of baptism is completed only with confirmation. This ceremony emboldens the candidate to become a co-worker and witness to Jesus. The love of Christ induces the candidates to form a mutually loving community.

It is the anointment of *Mooron* which sustains and strengthens them the new life imparted to the candidate through baptism. Even though the minister does the final anointment he does it as a representative of the head of the church who has sanctified the *Mooron*. The power of consecrating *Mooron* is vested in the Bishops of the respective areas. This is a sacrament of the unity of the Church. The Ecumenical nature of the sacrament is reflected in the fact that *Mooron* used is the same and the fellowship evolved also is the same.

Note:

1. B.Varghese Holy Mooron in Syrian Tradition , PUROHITHAN Vol.X, 3 (1993) pp.33,53.
2. C.V John *Christian Sacraments* (Mal) (Tiruvalla, 1974) p.126.
3. Mar Thoma Syrian Church Order of Services (Tiruvalla, 1988) pp.19-23.

V

CONFESSION

The main message implied in the Bible is that through confession, God is willing to give us more and more chances to return to Him. Whenever the scourge of sin overtakes us if we repent and regret the fall, God comes in the person of Christ to accept the repentant sinners. When we are reconciled to God and our fellowbeing we get a sense of inner healing and an encouragement to live without sin. Confession is the accepted means in the church for the healing of sinners.

Biblical Basis

“Time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel” (Mark. 1: 14, 15). This is the exhortation that Christ gave at the beginning of his mission. The main aim of His mission was to deliver people from ailments, death and sin. Jesus declared that the son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10, 11). John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1: 29, 36). This power to remit sins was later passed on to the church. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:21-23). The church which has the apostolic succession has inherited this power. The minister, being the representative of the church, exercises this power. Thus confession is a sacrament that brings inner healing.

Theology of confession

Humanbeing is estranged from nature, God and fellowbeings by committing sin. Remission of sins is the main purpose of the Gospel. Sins are of two kinds:-corporal and personal. It is the deliverance from these two that the believers achieve through repentance and

confession. The church confirms this by absolution. A person oppressed by his own sins repents and confesses and the minister declares that his sins are forgiven. The Holy Communion is celebrated by the community that consists of individuals who have reconciled to each other and to God, by confession and repentance. In the Reformed Churches like Mar Thoma and Anglican churches the practice is public confession. There is no private confession (auricular confession) in these churches.

Confession is the established sacrament which will help us to get complete deliverance from sin. The acceptance of guilt of sin and repentance and the willingness to confess them are the prerequisites for forgiveness of sins. Confession is made to God and forgiveness of sins is done by God. The minister representing the church makes the declaration of absolution. The suitability of a person to partake in the Holy Communion arises from reconciliation and forgiveness of sins. With repentance the congregation receives forgiveness of sins directly from the Almighty. This is why just before receiving the Holy Communion the minister says, “O ! Lord, blot out the sins of all who are present and of all for whom we pray” Remission of our debts and forgiveness of our sins are the most important factors of this juncture.

The awareness of sin and the role of the Holy Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit that generates the awareness of sin in the people and encourages them to confess (John 16: 7, 8). Declaration of repentance and forgiveness of sins are the ways to join God in his missions. The declaration of absolution is given by the priest due to our dependence and confidence that we have in the Lord who is merciful and who is full of grace. The good news is that the person who is immersed in sins is pardoned and made free by Jesus Christ. The priest is the representative of the worshippers. But the church believes that the remission of sins is done by Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Explanation of Confession

In the old prayer book of the Mar Thoma church prayers for confession are given for everyday of the week. In the opening prayers it is mentioned. Those who are preparing for the Holy Communion must have peace with God and reconciliation with their brethren. They should be aware of their sins and the seriousness of the same with true repentance, humility and compassion. They have to earnestly read the Psalms of repentance for seven days.

The Holy Qurbana is conducted usually only after the divine service. Those who came prepared to receive the Holy Communion either by kneeling or standing repeat the prayer of repentance, which the priest reads out. Then the priest declares absolution. The following is a short critique of the order of confession now in vogue in the church.

1. Emphasis on divine plan of salvation.

A declaration of faith is made in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, born of virgin Mary, who suffered and died for the redemption of human kind, and in the Holy Spirit the giver of sanctified life. Here we see a congregation, remembering God's ways of human salvation and regretful of our sins.

2. Belief in the Holy Trinity.

We reaffirm our faith in Holy Trinity. It was one of the fundamental beliefs of the early Church. Rebellion from the faith in the Trinity is the main point of discussion here.

3. Universal Nature of Sin

Sin is all pervading in each individual. The prayer of repentance is an expression of regret, for the faults, in words, thoughts and deeds of a person. This is a total confession of his failure and frailty. It is the hope of the believer that he had committed sins and deliverance will be attained through repentance.

4. Acceptance before God

The belief that the fallen person will be saved through Christ is accepted here. Those who confess their sins to God, do so in totality. They are assured of complete acceptance by God.

5. Dedication of future life to God

God the savior makes you brave and comforts you. Taking part in the Holy Communion gives you the chamber for fellowship with God and with your fellowmen. The confession ends with a prayer that it may act like bridge to eternal life.

Then comes the declaration by the minister that your sins are remitted by God through his son. It makes the people confident and free from the sense of guilt. The church is given guidelines to attract non-Christians through the ways of God. At the same time the congregation should be led to deliverance and eternal life through repentance. Thus the sacrament of confession is a very important factor in the worship of the church.

VI

THE HOLY COMMUNION

(Holy Qurbana)

In the name of Jesus Christ the savior, the congregation gathers for the Holy Communion. They recollect the commandment of Jesus, persecution, death, burial, and resurrection. They express their gratitude to God and perform the sacramental rites. Through this they become the participants in the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ and they get a foretaste of the salvation and the kingdom of God. They also await his second coming and grow in the divine life.

Each prayer is an exhortation to the believers to remember the plan of salvation and to lead a life of happy fellowship with each other. It is not easy to explain the teachings and faith of the church by taking any individual prayer. Each part of the worship service is to be evaluated in the light of the history and tradition of the church. In particular in the oriental churches, the theology and faith are found in the order of worship handed down to us. This is an attempt to evaluate and assess the theology involved in St. James Liturgy (*Thaksa*) which is being used in our church at present.¹

The structure of St. James Liturgy

It is believed that this Liturgy (Order of Holy Qurbana) was written by James the Apostle who was Jesus brother. This was translated from Greek to Syriac in the 5th century; but it was in use from the 4th century also. This become very popular during the 17th century in the Malankara Churches and was adapted in the 19th century in keeping with the new trends of thought due to reformation.²

There are three parts for this text:- preparatory service, Ante-Communion and Holy Communion service.

1. Preparatory Service (*Thooyaba*)

This precedes the Ante-Communion Service. There are two portions in this. This can be done privately or publicly. The first part consists of prayers of repentance, and during the second part the minister puts on the vestments and arranges the bread and wine on the altar. Then he prays for himself.

2. Ante-Communion

This part brings to the believers an experience of the living presence of Jesus amidst them. Then the curtain is drawn and a prayer is said beseeching God's blessings and reminding the congregation about the incarnation and baptism of Christ. This is a proclamation of the presence of Jesus. In the response of the congregation, the person of Christ is fully revealed and they recite as follows:-

“We magnify you, O' Lord our king, the only begotten son, word of the Father, Lord Jesus Christ, immortal in your nature, who were born of the Virgin Mary for the life and salvation of all humankind. Without change of nature, you became the son of Man and were crucified for us, thus trampling death under foot and destroying it forever. You are one in Holy trinity and are worshipped and glorified equally with your Father and your living Holy Spirit. Have mercy upon us”. The above prayer is Christo-centric. At the same time the incarnation of Christ and divinity is given equal importance. It also reminds us the history of God's Salvation. It reveals the fundamentals of Christian faith.

In continuation the holiness of God is repeatedly asserted and God's mercy is prayed for. “Holy art thou O God- mercy upon us” is recited three times. This is not addressed as a praise to the Trinity; but it is addressed to Jesus as a prayer, according to Churches following the Antiochene tradition.³ The churches following Chalcedonian synod is of the opinion that the above prayer is addressed to the Trinity (A.D. 451).

Then follows ‘the Ministry of the Word’. The Deacon reads from the Epistle and then the minister reads the Gospel. The Gospel, the true words of Jesus Christ are read as per Christian traditions. These are the deserving words of a living God. In addition to bring a reminder of the past, it tells us that God speaks to us through the words of the Gospel. So this reading of the Gospel is a revered act and it is an encounter with the risen Christ.

After the Bible reading, *Promion*, prayer for remission of sins and *Sedara* are recited with repentance. Through the prayer for remission of sins, the minister prays for his own sins and of all the believers. Jesus Christ is addressed as redeemer of sins. The prayer that follows is reminiscent of the history of salvation. Both mind and heart are lifted to God. The congregation and the minister recite the Nicene Creed and praise the Holy Trinity, with the sermon the first part (the Ante -Communion) comes to an end. In the earlier days those who had come without preparation to receive the Holy Communion used to leave the church at this juncture.

Those who come prepared for the communion confess the sins and the Minister declares absolution.

Holy communion Service (*Anaphora*)

The portion from the prayer for peace to the 4th blessing is known as the communion service. The Greek word '*Anaphora*' means offerings, dedication, proclamation of the news. The Syriac word '*Kareb*' means to offer or to dedicate. '*Qurbana*' is derived from the word '*Kareb*' which means offering, dedication etc. The sanctification of bread and wine is the main factor in this part of the service.

Prayer for Peace

The prayer for peace is for the reconciliation of the participants through fellowship, by kiss of peace. The believers exchange hand clasp ('*Kayya Soori*') at this point, to indicate reconciliation with God and among the fellowbeing. The direction of Christ that the communicants have to reconcile before coming together for the communion, is thus fulfilled (Mathew 5:23,24, 6:12).⁴

Love of God to humanbeing is expressed in the rest of the communion service. The minister prays addressing God who through his great love sent his only begotten son to gather the lost sheep, to accept our humble prayer not because we deserve it, but only because of his mercy. He beseeches that this offering be treated as a sign of gratitude to the son and Holy Spirit and for the remission of sins.

Lifting and waving of Veil (*Sosappa*)

The piece of cloth with intricate work of art showing the cross, used to cover the chalice and the paten is called '*Sosappa*'. This represents the holiness and presence of God. The Deacon calls upon the participants to observe decorum during the service. Grace, peace

and praise are offered as sacrifice to God the Father. At that time the Minister removes the '*Sosappa*'. The mystery is open to all the participants. It is open to everybody. The remaining part of the meditation goes like this:- 'You are that rock in Horeb which Moses struck with his staff resulting in the abundant flow of drinking water, for all the Israelites (Exo. 17:5-6, Cor. 10:1-4). The rock tested and found wanting by the artisans which turned out to be really invaluable is seen in you. As Moses produced water from the rock and quenched the thirst of the people, Jesus gives water of life to His people. Mysteries of Heaven are revealed to the world through Holy Communion. *Sosappa* represents the glory and halo covering the whole creation (Ex. 24:15-18, I Kings 8:10, 11, Psalms 72:19, Isa.6:1-3). This is the significance of the removal of *Sosappa*. The first blessing is done here.

Call to Praise the Lord

The bread and wine are sanctified as the body and blood of Jesus, through the process of the narration of the institution of the last supper and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. This is in the form of dialogue and it is meant to draw the attention of the people. This starts with the blessing in the name of Trinity (2Cor-13:14)

The intention of the dialogical type of prayer is to lift the hearts and minds of the believers to the heavenly Father. The congregation responds positively and says that 'to praise the Lord is good and right'. Similar practice is followed by the Jews after the meals. It shows that the liturgy is influenced by their tradition. Then the minister declares that we ought to praise the Lord of hosts because he is exalted as 'Holy, Holy, Holy' by all the powers in the Universe and by angels and archangels whose names are recorded in heaven. Then the congregation respond that Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God almighty heaven and earth are full of his glory..... and *Hosanna* in the highest.⁵. The believers are nurtured in God's love and the grace of the Holy Spirit at this point of time. They get a feeling of lifted up in spirit and experience of worshiping with angels and archangels and heavenly hosts and with the whole universe. We are reminded by this prayer that the Eucharist (Holy Communion) is an offering of praise to God, the Father, by the universal church. The response of the people here has been taken from (Isa. 6:3, Mathew 21:9) Combined in the order of the worship of the Eastern churches, this prayer is found from the 4th C. The church today thrives in the belief of the second coming of Christ who established her originally. This part ends in the praise of the

Lord. It is also implied that heaven also witness the Eucharist. (Eze.10 Dan. 7:10, Rev.4:8-10). In a silent prayer or in a prayer of meditation the minister recollects the creation, fall, guidance by the prophets, and finally the salvation through His only begotten son. This is a Christo-centric prayer.

Words of institution

The Lord's supper is seen in the order of service as the last supper of Christ. There is a description of what happened in the 'Upper Room' during the last Supper. Jesus words are repeated, "Take, eat, this is my body" Then he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them saying, "drink from it all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many, for the remission of sins" (1 Cor. 11:24,25, Math. 26: 26-29, Mark 14: 22-25, Luke 22:14-20).

Anamnesis (Remembrance)

After giving thanks during the last supper, the words of Jesus are echoed in the recital accompanying consecration service. He broke it (bread) and said, "This is my body, which is for you, do this in remembrance of me". Thus the minister says, "when ever you break this bread and drink of this wine his death is proclaimed." The congregation responds, "Lord we remember your death, we celebrate your resurrection and we look forward to your second coming." This is a recalling of the past into the present. Holy Qurbana is not merely a remembrance of the plan of salvation. It is also a living experience of our lives. It is also a meeting point of the past and the future-the incarnation and the second coming, focusing them to the present. We become participants in the death on the cross, resurrection and the second coming of Christ.

In the prayer that follows we are reminded of the death, burial, His resurrection, His ascension to heaven and also His presence at the right hand of the Father and His coming again. This part ends in praise of the Lord by the congregation and thanks giving and silent prayer of the minister. It is to be noted that the whole process is Christo-centric in nature.

Prayer for the Invocation of the Holy Spirit

This prayer is for the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. This is also known as '*Epiclesis*' and is a very important factor in the ceremony. The oriental school of thought emphasizes that it is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies and enlivens everything. There are many prayers in the Baptism, Holy Communion, ordination etc. where the Holy Spirit is shown as a potent force.

In the order of the communion service, there are clear indications that the Holy Spirit plays an important role in the crucial situations. John the Baptist who was the forerunner of Christ was filled with Holy Spirit even before he was born. The incarnation of Christ was through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35, Mathew 1:20). Jesus himself was filled with Holy Spirit before he started his ministry and proclaimed the Gospel (Luke.3:21,22). His resurrection also was made alive by the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18). In the plan of salvation, everywhere we see the role of the Holy spirit. The importance of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and the belief is evident here.

There are two expressions written in the prayer book. One is “May your Holy Spirit come” and the other one is ‘send your Holy Spirit’⁶. In the order of worship of the Chaldean church, viz ‘Adai and Mari’ and in the book of the Maronite church, expression used are “May your Holy Spirit come”. But in the St.James Liturgy it is said, “send your Holy Spirit.” The silent prayer in St.James liturgy used by the Mar Thoma Church is given below.

“God the father, have mercy upon us we beseech thee to send us, the Holy Spirit who is equal to the father and the son in royalty, eternity and who spoke in testaments old and new, who came down like a dove to river Jordan, who descended on the apostles like tongues of fire in the ‘Upper Room’ to sanctify us and the bread and wine (*Order of Holy Qurbana of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, p.26)

In the prayer for sanctification of bread and wine the reference is made to the part played by the Holy Spirit in all the crucial situations in the plan of salvation. In the process the believers are also to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Special emphasis is given to this point. The same thing is to be accomplished by the Holy Communion also. The very same Holy Spirit is at work in sanctifying the believers and the bread and wine. In all the ancient liturgies, this point is given special emphasis. This should be reintroduced in the Church. The minister places his hands on the bread and wine and prays, “ May the Holy Spirit sanctify this bread that it may be the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit sanctify the wine in the chalice that it may be the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ”. This is the closing prayer for this portion.

Then the minister prays for the church to be protected from blasphemy. He further prays for the communicants, so that they produce good fruits and deeds for the benefit of the church, and for

the soundness of their body, mind and soul. The Holy Communion helps the believers to be firm in their faith and to lead a fruitful Christian life.

Prayers of Intercession (*Thubden*)

The Syriac word '*Thubden*' means 'again' - These are six prayers starting with this word. In all these the minister says a silent prayer and the Deacon speaks part of it and the congregation says '*Kyre-elaison*' meaning 'Lord have mercy on us'. The church prays for the leaders of the church, political leaders and for the members of the church. In this prayer the first three Ecumenical Councils of the church, saints, and the people who died in Christian faith are remembered. He also prays that the believers should be helped to follow in their foot steps of faith.

Here the minister says the second '*Rushma*' (blessing), with the sign of the cross.

Breaking of the Bread

The service of the breaking of the bread (fraction) is done by the minister. Here, the crucifixion, the passion and the flowing of blood and water from the pierced side, and the death and resurrection of Christ are remembered. We also remember the peace and reconciliation attained through the passion of Jesus Christ. During the breaking of the bread, the congregation sings '*Ardra mathe.....*(We knock at the door...)' or the Deacon reads the appropriate passage from the collection of prayers or litany.

Lords Prayer

After the breaking of bread, the Lord's prayer is recited by the whole congregation. The humankind that fell from the grace of God, because of sins could come back to Him and call Him 'Father' through Jesus Christ. Then they could call Him 'Our Father in Heaven' by way of inherited rights. Cyril of Jerusalem, the church father is of the opinion that 'it is the right of the baptized believers to recite the Lord's Prayer'. This is a sign of reconciliation and fellowship between God and believers, and among fellow beings. Some western churches recite the Lord's prayer immediately before the Holy Communion as a sign of reconciliation.

The third blessing (*Rushma*) is a proclamation of faith and a description of all the characteristics of the Holy Trinity.

The Elevation of Eucharist

Raising the chalice and the paten, the minister proclaims “Holy things for Holy people” implying that only the Triune God is holy. Meanwhile the congregation affirms that the only God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are truly holy and that the Trinity is with us. With this faith in mind, they go forward for receiving the communion.

Receiving the Holy Communion

Then the minister and the communicants who have confessed their sins and who have come prepared for the Holy communion receive the sanctified bread and wine. The thanksgiving prayer, expressing gratitude to God for his abundant mercy and for their strengthening with precious Body and Blood of the Son and Saviour - Jesus Christ, is said by the minister. With this the sacrament of Holy Communion comes to an end.

So far we have been discussing and evaluating the St. James' Liturgy. Now let us study the oriental way of worship and its unique features, before we conclude this chapter.

The special features of the order of the Holy Qurbana in the Eastern Churches

The main feature of the Communion followed by the Eastern churches is its corporate nature. Through baptism and Holy Communion the believers, as members of the church, join Christ as a community. The bond between people and God, and among the fellow beings is through Jesus Christ.⁷

The spirituality of Christian Eucharist is centered around Christ who was incarnated as a human being in a particular moment of time in history.

The community of believers looking back into the earthly life of Christ, celebrate his resurrection and look forward to the completion of an era ending with consummation of history (*eschaton*)

Participation of the Congregation

The wholehearted participation of the community in the Holy Communion service is a special feature of the oriental churches. By their response through the recitals and singing they make the worship quite lively. For example, when the minister consecrates the bread saying, “May the Holy Spirit sanctify the bread”, the congregation responds, “Bless, O Lord”. In the same way wine also is sanctified with the participation of the communicants. Both the minister and the

congregation are actively involved in this process. In many other occasions also there is active participation of the believers. In the Mar Thoma church the priest does not celebrate the Holy communion without the presence of the people.

We have already seen that bread and wine are sanctified along with the believers in the consecrating prayer. In the view of the oriental churches, the sanctification becomes complete not by any particular event but in the total liturgical act.

Liturgy is rich in Theological ideas

Reading of the Bible and the preaching nourish Christian spirits. Likewise liturgy is filled with theological ideas. It is in the Liturgy that the teachings and belief of the church are contained. It is through the Holy Communion service that the believers are reminded of creation, fall of human beings from grace, the plan of salvation, incarnation of Jesus, death on the cross, resurrection, ascension, the gift of the Holy Spirit and glorious appearance of the risen Christ. Holy communion prepares the believers to build the kingdom of God.

The order of prayer of the Eastern churches is full of Biblical Images, metaphors and symbols

The Bible itself is the result of the faith and vision of the community. In the liturgies and prayers of the church, lot of Biblical images, symbols and metaphors are used.

The Eastern worship is centered around 'Trinitarian' doctrine

In the tradition of the Eastern church, Trinity is the basis of religious thinking and experience. This is clear from the nature of the prayers of the church. Prayer to God by the Son is in the Holy Spirit. Praising and glorifying the father, the son and the Holy Spirit is very common. In St. James' Liturgy also, there are many prayers involving Trinity. There are references to the Trinity. Prayers addressing the Trinity are seen in the exhortation for praising God, invocation for the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the prayer before the second blessing and the prayer before the third blessing. During the fourth and the fifth centuries when there were lot of controversies about the 'person' of Christ in the Church (Christological controversies), the doctrine of Trinity gained strength in the order of worship and teachings of the Church.⁸

The Holy Communion is the thanksgiving to God and remembrance of Jesus Christ.⁹ It signifies fellowship between God and the believers

and among the believers. It is also a fore-taste of the heavenly banquet (feast). Holy Communion is not merely remembrance; but it is also making present of the salvation event here and now. The experience of salvation becomes a reality today.

By participating in the Holy Communion the life of the people is enriched, because it helps us to travel in the divine path, to love one another, to make life more worthwhile. It encourages us to lead a noble and blameless Christian life.

“Praise be to you, O’ Lord, our God for ever. Praise be to you, O’ Lord Jesus Christ. May your holy body and blood of which we have partaken be not for our condemnation but for life and salvation to us all. O! God, grant us your blessing.(Thanks giving prayer from the St. James Liturgy) ¹⁰

Note:

1. For a detailed study of the Structure and Theology of the Anaphora of St. James See: George Mathew *Qurbana, the celebration of the Economy of Salvation*, OIRSI (Vadavathoor, 1998)
2. George Mathew Development and Revisions of Liturgy, in *Malankara Mar Thoma Church Liturgy*, (Manganam, 1993) pp.7-12.
3. Louis Moolaveetil *A Study of the Anaphora of St.James*.(Mal) (Vadavathoor, 1976).
4. George Mathew ‘The Kiss of Peace in Bible and Liturgy’ in *Sabha Tharaka*. (December, 1994) (Mal) p.7-10.
5. S.P Brock ‘The Thrice Holy Hymn in Liturgy’ in J.Vellian (ed), *the Study in in Syriac Spirituality* (Poona, 1988) pp.21-29
6. *S.P Brock Holy Spirit and Eucharist* in J.Vellian (ed) *Holy Spirit in Syrian Baptismal Tradition*.(Poona, 1979), pp.116-27
7. Paulose Mar Gregorios *The Joy of Freedom*, (Madras,1986) pp.14,25,42-52.
8. B.Varghese ‘West Syrian Anaphora as an expression of Trinitarian Doctrine’ in *Harp* Vol.IV,12,p.2-3.
9. Matrimort. *The Eucharist* (Collegeville,1986)pp.93 ff.
10. *The Order of the Holy Qurbana of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church* (Tiruvalla,1942)(Mal).

VII

HOLY COMMUNION: BANQUET OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the Bible and in the Liturgy, the idea of feasting together and dining at the same table is taken as a characteristic of the great Messianic age and also as a foretaste of the kingdom of God. Only in this context the implication of the communion as a Eucharist, the banquet of the kingdom of God, could be fully understood and assessed.

Holy communion is connected with feast, kingdom of God, Eschatology(end time) and the mission of the church. The inter-relation among these needs an in-depth study.

Banquet as seen in the Bible : In the Old-Testament

In the Old Testament feasting together was a sign of the memorial of salvific event and the fellowship of the community. After Israel become the chosen people of God, eating together was a common and religious function. In all the ancient religions, serving food was considered as part of the religious function. As per the book of Genesis(Chapt.1-3), for human being and nature the interaction with God was a source of great pleasure. The fact that God cares for human was clear from the bounty that He bestowed on him. The forbidden fruit was the cause of human estrangement with God(Gen.2:17,3:3). Dining together gives them fellowship and interaction. Due to the sin human being lost their fellowship with God. To salvage the situation and to bring human being back to track, God used the medium of meals as seen from time to time. God's salvific involvement in history has been expressed by meals. For example the

announcement that the old couple Abraham and Sarah were going to get a child as promised by God, was followed by meal (Gen. 18:1-8), the deliverance of the Israelites from the yoke of Pharaoh (Ex. 12: 1-28), the covenant of Sinai (Exo. 24:21), the way God fed the Israelites with 'Manna' in the desert- all these are indications that food is an instrument of reconciliation and fulfillment of the promise.

The same pattern was reflected in the following events. (1) During the 'Passover' there was a feast (Exo. 12). (2) Jacob offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives for a meal (Gen. 31:54). (3) when Aaron and the elders got the news through Moses of their liberation from Pharaoh, they celebrated it with a feast (Exo. 18:12). Through '*Pessha*' the bond between God and human being was renewed and they experienced the presence of God. With the renewal of covenant and communion, their faith in God and dependence on God strengthened. This religious tradition of feasting together was indicative of the great era of happiness and renewal as predicted by Isaiah (Isa. 25:6, 55:1-2, 65:1-13).

In the Rabbinic tradition glory of the Messianic age was exhibited in their dining style. Feasting is an expression of joy in the God's kingdom and this is called Messianic Banquet. It was their belief that God would be preparing a banquet for the redeemed. (Isa. 25:6)

In the Wisdom literature of those days, food and drink were considered as acknowledgement of God's blessing (Pro. 9: 1-16, Psalms 23-5, Song. 5:1). In Apocalyptic literature, food and drink were considered as the means of salvation. As they were fed by 'manna' in the desert they believed that they would be led to their homes by God from the wilderness (Isa-49:9, 10, 48, 21). They also hoped that God would restore them in the newly established kingdom (Ez. 34:25-31, Isa. 55:1,2). They expected that the believers would enjoy good food and be happy in the era of Messiah (Isa. 65:13, 25:6-9 Zac. 9:15,16). During the inter-testamental period there is a reference to the era of Messiah, awaiting them, a beginning of a new age, abundance of food, and a new type of 'Manna'. In the writing of *Kumran* it is recorded that the community was looking forward to the delicacies of the Messianic age.

New Testament: The meals and Jesus

In God's plan of salvation with the incarnation of Christ, for the redemption and reconciliation of the believers, eating together as a community became a popular practice.

In Jesus's life and mission, eating with guests was given great importance (Luke 10:38-42, John 2:1-11). His participation in such gatherings of his disciples and followers was a part of his act of redemption. It was also a sign of his complete identity with humankind. By dining with tax-collectors and sinners, Jesus was making way for their salvation (Matthew 2:10, Luke 9:10). By sitting at the table with the out-castes of the society, Jesus was accepting them as part of the society and he was forging a bond with them. The Pharisees blamed him for this and said, "The son of man came eating and drinking. Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mat. 11:19, Mark 2:15-17). This new gesture of eating with such a group was a sign of his method of salvation and reconciliation. This was a reflection and foretaste of the Messianic age. This was also a declaration that the road to salvation and forgiveness of sins is through Jesus (Luke 7:14, 19:9).

Jesus was the 'Bread of Life'. He entered into a new bond with humankind by offering himself as food and drink. The fullness of salvation and the consequent new life is compared to a wedding feast. We are given the assurance and hope that we will be invited for the great feast.

Christ accepts the invitation to dine

It is written in the Gospel, that He was a guest in the house of Levi (Mark 2:15-17), Simon who was a leper (Mark 14:3, 9), the house of the pharisee (Luke 7:36, 50), house of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42), house of Zacchaeus and in the wedding house at Cana (John 2:1-11). Jesus saw to it that his mission encompasses the social outcasts and untouchables. Reacting to adverse criticism he declared, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call righteous, but the sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31). In this manner he guided them to God.

Jesus Christ Provided food for his followers

Jesus provided food for all his disciples and followers. By acting along with them Jesus was trying to face the pulse of the society and to experience the happiness of the kingdom to come. (Mark 6:30-41, Matthew 15:32-39, John 6:1-14, Mark 8:1-10)

Eucharist (Qurbana) as a meal- banquet

On completion of the act of salvation and the earthly mission, Jesus had a dinner with his disciples. This is known as 'last supper'. According to the gospel writers, this was the 'pass over' or '*Pescha*'

meal (Mathew 26:29-29, Mark 14:22-26, Luke 22:19). This was the instituting of the Holy Communion.

The brotherhood of human beings and the fellowship in the community were experienced in the process of eating together. Jesus told them, “I will no longer drink it the fruit of wine until that day I drink anew in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25). He also said, “Many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Mathew 8:1, Luke 14:15-24). The Holy Communion is to be understood as foretaste of the kingdom of God described above. He commanded “Do this in my remembrance until I come”. Jesus meant that as a memory of the last supper Holy Communion should be celebrated until the believers reach the kingdom of God. Therefore, Holy Communion reminds us of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross and makes us look forward for his second coming, and await the royal feast.

The Christian believers are nourished in faith by the Holy Communion. We enjoy his companionship. It encourages us to love God and our fellow beings. The Holy Communion is a foretaste of the heavenly dinner that is awaiting us. The Holy Communion is to be understood to be instrumental to give us a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven.

It was during the course of the last supper that Jesus established this practice of Holy Communion. It has connection with bread and wine, body and blood of Christ. “Considering the fact that Jesus has again and again used food and drink as parables during his public ministry, Holy Communion can be taken as a parallel to nourish and strengthen the believers” says the theologian, Lobmeyer.

It is to be noticed that Jesus had the post ‘Resurrection meal’ with his disciples. When the eleven disciples were having meal he appeared before them after the resurrection (Mark 16:41-58). While he was breaking the bread only two of his disciples recognized him (Luke 24:13-35). Jesus prepared breakfast for seven of them. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast” (John 21:10-13). From all these occasions it is clear that sharing of food is a must in the kingdom of God.

The Idea of feast in the order of worship(Liturgy)

In the order of worship of the Eastern churches the ideas of feast and dining is mentioned several times. For example in the ‘*Promion*’ (introductory prayer), of the Holy Qurbana, the prayer is to make us

rejoice in the bridal chamber or the kingdom of heaven, with the guests and with the marriage party and we also express our desire to be seated on the right hand side with the distinguished guests. In the order of Holy matrimony prayer is, “Make us happy in your heavenly bridal chamber. Make us worthy of the marriage feast, promised to your saints who love you and keep your commandments” (*Order of Holy Qurbana*, p.24).

Eucharist and the kingdom of God

We are all invitees of Jesus to eat and drink in the kingdom of heaven in the presence of God, the father. This shows the universality of God’s love. At the time of each Holy Communion we are reminded of Jesus’s promise of our taking part in the heavenly feast. We also look forward for that great day. Eucharist is the witness of God’s reign over us and our unity with Christ. It is the Holy communion that fortifies us to fight against the evil forces, and enables us to declare God’s reign and gathers the faithful together.

Holy Communion is a renewal of the new covenant. It is the redemption obtained through the sacrifice of Jesus, the sacrificial lamb. Those who accepted his reign, enter into a new covenant with him through the Holy Communion. It is also a renewal of the covenant entered into by Baptism. Those who entered in to a new covenant start a new style of living. Therefore the Sacrament of Holy communion, has several moral footing (Foundation). Sanctification, introspection and repentance are the three conditions for this feast, according to St. Paul (1 Cor. 11:27-32). Holy Communion is not merely about God’s care and love, it is also about the moment of judgement. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body of the Lord, eats and drinks adverse judgement on himself.

The church through the Holy Communion is proclaiming God’s reign over the entire humanity, the whole creation and the universe. This reality is affirmed by the chanting of the congregation, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty. Heaven and earth are full of His glory”. It is implied in the Holy Communion that all the creation are comprised in the kingdom of God. It is also the fore-taste of the new heaven and new earth for which we are looking forward.

For kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, Peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because any one who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by human beings (Rom. 14:17). Holy communion becomes a sign of justice when

the fellowship of God lost by sin is retrieved at the dining table. It becomes a sign of peace when the everlasting peace ie the peace between human being and God, is established, resulting in the spirit of joy. Holy Communion becomes a source of spiritual joy when it results in the ecstasy of heaven (Eph.5:19, Gal.5:21-23). The fellowship in heaven, sharing of joy and the ecstasy we reach, give us the experience of heaven.

Eucharist an eschatological action

Since Holy Communion gives us a taste of the kingdom of God, and God's intervention, it leads us to the sign post pointing to the day of Judgement. All the references to Holy Communion touch upon the times ahead and the vision of the future. "I tell you the truth I will not drink again of the fruit of the wine until that day when, I drink it's a new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). These two verses are also indicative of the day of judgement. Holy Communion is a sign of things to come.

Holy Communion and the Mission

Holy Communion is a sign of what is promised as a treat in God's everlasting kingdom. Therefore Holy Communion has a Missionary dimension. It reveals God's plan of universal salvation. By the crucifixion and resurrection, the prediction that people from the east and the west will come and sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God for a special feast is fulfilled. The disciples revealed to the world the meaning of the kingdom of God by the preaching of the Gospel s and celebration of Holy Communion. The disciples realized the importance of the heavenly feast through the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Jesus is even today inviting the tax collectors, sinners, woman of low virtues and the outcastes from society, to join Him in the feast. All are welcome for this grand feast. The universality of Holy Communion made it a missionary event.

VIII

HOLY MATRIMONY

The sacrament of Matrimony renders God's recognition and blessing to the relationship between the husband and wife. In married life there are three entities to reckon with:-God, husband and wife. Christian marriage is a sacrament conducted by the church with God as its mediator. It is a means of receiving God's blessing. It is through the institution of marriage that a family gets the chance to meet with Christ and to take up their family responsibilities and to lead a life bearing witness to Christ and his mission. The basis of Christian marriage is to be found in the divine purpose of family as revealed in the Bible. The theology of Matrimony as a sacrament, is the subject matter of this chapter in the light of the Old Testament and New Testament. The view of the Eastern churches about matrimony is expressed particularly in the liturgy. So the Theology of Matrimony must be studied deeply with the analysis of the liturgy.

Old Testament Basis of Matrimony

The most important institution established by God is the family. The family is shaped and sustained by matrimony. God's creation of man and woman as a couple and their union as husband and wife are the starting point of the family (Gen-1:27, 28, 2:8-25). It is an indivisible union centered on love. They become one by mutual consent. Marriage has three components:- Mental, Physical and spiritual. Marriage is the unification of these components of man and woman. Family life is the building block established by God to carry out his purpose, to continue the species, and to glorify God.¹ It gains on strength through faith, prayer and God's blessings.

Sexuality is a great gift of God. God has made man and woman as partners in the fruitful creation of life. Sexuality is lifted to a higher plane of holiness and purity through the sacrament of marriage. When man and woman, joined by God, become one, sexuality becomes meaningful and complete.

The old Testament contains two instructions regarding marriage. God who created male and female of the specious has done all his creation in the fitness of things. All relationships including marriage are reflective of the eternal bond between God and the chosen people of Israel. It is a plan of the creation.²

New Testament view

1.The approach of Jesus to Marriage

Even though Jesus has not directly dealt with the institution of marriage, the Church has taken into account, the attitude of Jesus to marriage, in her teachings about it (Mathew 19:4-6). The teachings of Christ are based on the scheme of creation, as given in the old Testament (Gen. 2:18-24). It is God's will that man and woman should become one.

In the history of creation, the institution of marriage is commendable and is a part of God's own plan of salvation. The holy and ideal marriage bond should not be broken asunder. A life long bond, filled with God's love and the healing touch, is in fact an ideal marriage. Love between husband and wife should be based on the love of the risen Christ. A personal relation with Jesus together with respect for His teachings will generate trust and care for each other.

Christ was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4) and he dedicated all his life in Nazareth for the well-being of His family and thus he made his life in the family a sacrament (Luke 11:27). The indivisibility and respectability of married life were made clear by Jesus Christ. He gave equal importance to man and woman in the frame work of married life (Mark 10:11, 12).

2.In the Epistles of Paul

According to St. Paul marriage bond should be sacred. It involves mutual surrender and love (1Cor.6:19, 20, 7: 3,4). Christian marriages are compared to the relation between Adam and Eve and Christ and Church (Eph.5: 21-33). The love of the husband to the wife is like the love of Christ to the Church. The wife surrenders to the husband like church surrenders to Christ. The ideal christian married life should be bound by spontaneous and spotless love, like the love of Christ the

quality of family life is to be judged by the standard set by the love of Christ. The love between Christ and the church, should be the model for a married couple to follow. One should not dominate over the other and should not treat the other person as a slave. According to St. Paul, "Just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the Church; and he is the saviour of the body." Husband ought to love his wife". In the above view matrimony is a covenant and at the same time it is a sacrament involving the Church and Christ.³

Matrimony - a Sacrament

Christ the Messiah assumes the role of the bridegroom of the Church-the bride, paying the price for it with His blood. Likewise Christians who became the temple of God through baptism look upon matrimony as a mystery the same as the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph-5:32). Just like the church subjects itself to Christ, evoking its protective love, the husband and wife should lead their lives. With the sacraments of matrimony the sexuality of the couple takes a sacramental dimension.

The Eastern churches consider matrimony as a sacrament. It should be a long-lasting relationship founded on trust and the love of God. This view derived from the Bible is taken seriously by the church. The church prays for the couple conferring God's grace on them, who love and trust each other. Matrimony does not become a sacrament by the rituals used at the ceremony.⁴ It is the spirit of sharing, surrendering, and becoming one in the love of Christ that makes it a real sacrament. In an ideal marriage, together they grow in faith, sanctify themselves, bear witness to God, love each other and surrender to each other. The matrimony opens a gate to a life of sanctity. Besides they also bring the children and the people who come in contact with them for good and meaningful life. Matrimony is a call to the sacrament of God's love.⁵

Theology of Marriage

The teachings on marriage are given in detail in the Liturgy of the matrimony. The Liturgy of the Eastern churches, especially the churches which follow the Antiochene traditions, are rich in theology. But they are not analyzed properly and studied deeply. In the Syrian church the order of service of matrimony is taken from the Jacobite Church with West Syrian tradition. It is believed that Jacob of Edessa

wrote this order of service in the 8th C. (A.D.708). The service of matrimony is divided into two parts.

[1] Blessing of the ring (Engagement)

[2] Blessing of the crown (Marriage ceremony)

The Blessing of the Ring

It is reported that blessing of the ring was done at a different place before the marriage up to the 9th C, In some places up to the 13th C, these two were two different services (Hudaya Canon-8:2). Through the receiving of rings, this service symbolises the engagement ceremony. To start with there is a prayer for blessing from God for the bride, the groom and for the people assembled there. When we pray and say that our happiness begins, grows and reaches perfection in 'you' it means that the pleasure is not simply worldly; on the other hand it is rooted in the blessing of God.⁶

The minister prays for the blessing of the rings. It is the minister who puts the ring on the bride and the bridegroom in the name of Jesus. It is in the name of the Holy Trinity that the rings are blessed. This reflects the power of God, the faith of the minister and of the bride and bridegroom and their interaction with God. Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit extends his hands to bless the couple. The couple are the children of the church- the bride of Christ.⁷ This is also a reminder of connection between the church and Christ. The couple bowing before Christ,- the heavenly bridegroom are accepting Him as their mediator of their family life. This mystery is unraveled by the minister through action in putting the rings on the bride and the bridegroom. The church and the couple believe that their union is brought about by God through the Church. The church becomes instrumental in bringing the couple together and thus matrimony becomes a Sacrament.

The Significance of the Ring

If we scrutinize the order of prayer, we understand that, the ring is a symbol of the love of Christ to the church. Christ by sacrificing his life accepted the church as his bride. Christ in his graciousness chose the church as his bride. In the very same manner the couple are joined together and end up as husband and wife through the sacrament of matrimony. The church is not a mute witness; but potent instrument of God in this Sacrament.⁸ The rings stand for justice and sanctity.

Blessing of the Crown

From the 4th C. the blessing of the crown was in practice.⁹ The Jews used to wear a crown made of gold or any other metal even during the 1st C. John Chrysostom gave a Christian interpretation to this practice. The same practice had been adopted by the churches of Antiochene traditions from the 4th C.

The Significance of the Blessing of the Crown

Only in the Byzantine Church and in the Syrian churches the blessing of the crown is in practice. Since the bride and the bridegroom are considered to be the king and the queen of the empire of the family they are crowned. Through the blessing of the crown they deserve to become the participants in the kingdom of God. This is a sign of blessing and fullness in life. The crown of righteousness is sent down from the heaven through Christ. This is an indication of the forthcoming heavenly bliss and happiness and also it is a sign of victory. Those who are baptized in the church are also crowned in the Eastern churches. The crown is a sign of growth and victory of the believers. St. Ephrem, the church father says, “This crown is a sign of our free will”.¹⁰

Bible Reading

Just before the blessing of the crown, the portion of the Epistle which tells us the Christian attitude about matrimony is read out.¹¹ This is explained in the earlier portions of this chapter (Eph.5:20-28). According to St. Paul the relationship between the husband and wife is just like the relationship between Christ and the church. The husband and wife are joined together by God; therefore they cannot be separated by man. This is made clear in St. Mathew 19:1-6. At this point the hands of the bride and bridegroom are joined together. This to show that now onwards they are one and not two persons.

Tying of the ‘Tali’ or ‘Minnu’

This is a practice borrowed from the ancient Indian culture. This is adapted by the churches with lot of meaning and significance and Christian interpretation. The Tali is embedded with a sign of the cross is tied around the neck of the bride by the bridegroom. The sign of the cross on the Tali reminds us of the self-sacrifice and the blood-shedding of Christ on the cross. With the Tali, the wife indicates her submission and faithfulness to the husband, like the church does in relation to Christ.¹²

Manthra Kodi (the bridal garment)

The bride bedecked in the brand new beautiful dress dedicated to love and affection and adorned by the bridegroom conjures up the picture of the church as a bride dressed up in her glorious and pure white dress awaiting for her loving Lord and saviour Christ. This is also indicative of Jesus clothing the believers in glory, according to Mar Severious and Jacob of Serug of the Syrian Church.¹³ The bridal dress also brings to mind the inner qualities of the church, the heavenly glory and sheen provided her by Christ. This is a pointer to the fact that the brides through their inner beauty and spiritual qualities should follow the example of the heavenly bride namely the church and they should please their bridegrooms both the earthly made and the heavenly bridegroom that is Christ.

Entry into the Bridal Chamber

Even though the entry of the bride and the groom into bridal chamber is not part of our marriage service, it has been an ancient practice in our community. There is deep theological significance in this practice. In the service of the Syrian Catholic and Chaldean churches this is included as part of the Service.¹⁴ The bridal chamber is the residence of the groom and it is the right of the bride to share it with him. The bride submits herself in full, to the will of the bridegroom (Pslams 45:10).

The earthly bridal chamber gives us an idea of the heavenly bridal chamber and life in this chamber gives a foretaste of what to expect in the heavenly chamber. Life in the earthly chamber should be lived with great expectations in store for her in the heavenly chamber.¹⁵

Matrimony and the Mission

The Sacrament of matrimony brings to life the memory of God's will to make Israel a partner to his creation (Gen.1:28), the covenant between Christ and the church (Eph.5:26) and the incarnation of Christ. Through this Sacrament we participate in the plan of salvation of Christ. Therefore marriage is a salvific call from Christ.¹⁶ The couple submit themselves as offerings to God and become witnesses in His cause.

Through the Sacrament of matrimony the spiritual unity between Christ and the church is established. It is God's way of declaring the relation between Christ and the church. It may be said that the Sacrament of marriage makes us aware of the plan of salvation of Christ, and divine ways of Christ and of the church. It is also an

invitation for our mission in life. It tells us to witness God by setting an example in the family life. These days when the relation between man and woman is getting more and more complex, it is important that the family and the marriage are focused on Christian mission and faith. Matrimony should become an opportunity to proclaim the great love of God and to make a means of witnessing God.

Note:

1. J. Maniparampil *Sacraments Alur* (1995) (Mal) p.216.
2. George Mathew *A Study of the Sacraments and Worship of the Church* (Tiruvalla, 1995) pp.15-16.
3. J.Puvannikunnel 'Church the Bride and Marriage' (Talachery, 1994) (Mal) p.18-19.
4. George Mathew p.15
5. J.Maniparampil p.230-31.
6. C.A Abraham The Sacrament of Matrimony of Syro-Malankara Church, *Christian Orient* (Vol. IX, 1988)
7. K. Valuparampil The Theology and Spirituality of Holy Matrimony according to Malankara Syrian Church, *Christian Orient* Vol.XI (1990) p.136
8. K.Valuparampil p.138.
9. B. Varghese Abba Father, Kottayam (1985)(Mal) p.126
10. Quoted from St.Ephrem 'Hymn on Paradise' 12:18
11. A.T Zachariah (ed) *Sacraments and Sacramental Life* (Mal) (Calicut, 1995) pp.36-38.
12. J. Puvannikunnel p. 138
13. K Valuparampil pp.143-45
14. J.Puvannikunnel p.45.
15. K.V Mathew Faith and Practice of the Mar Thoma Church (Kottayam, 1985) pp.62-63.
16. K.Valuparampil *Christian Orient* Vol.XI.4 (1990) p.186-192.

IX

ORDINATION

Anyone who has received the Sacrament of baptism has the right to become a minister. There is no ministry for the church other than the ministry of Jesus Christ. Only those who love and serve God and those who are willing to serve the people are called upon by the church, to officiate as ministers. The believers should accept this call and dedicate their lives for the service. Some members of the local church are chosen and later on ordained and appointed as Deacons and Priests. This shows the catholicity of the church. This gives the church an administrative structure. The intention is to establish a link between God, the church and the world. Every official position in the church is earmarked for a particular duty in God's mission. Therefore the hierarchy of Deacon, Priest and the Bishop indicates the presence of God with different degree of authority vested in each one of them by the vibrant Sacrament of ordination.

Biblical Basis

The practice of selecting people suitable for administering the Sacraments, and preaching the gospel was existing from the time of the early church. The holy church is an arrangement that God made to guide the whole creation on earth to its fullness through the plan of salvation initiated by Christ. The church is the extension of the incarnation of Christ. Therefore all the services of the church can be considered to be the continuation of the ministry of Christ. "Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons" (St. Mark 3:14,15). It is seen that in the early church,

people were set apart for different services through the laying on of hands and prayer (Acts. 6:6). The instructions given by St. Paul about the qualifications of the candidates are found in the following references:- (1Tim.3:13, 4:12-6, Tit. 1:6-8). Apostle Peter has also given certain guidelines on the same subject (2 Pet. 4:10,11). The early church gave great importance to ordination (1 Timo. 4:14, 2 Timo. 1:6).

The priests are appointed by the church to continue the service started by the risen Christ, who is in our midst even today. The service of the priest is never a one-man-show; But it is a collective performance involving the priest and the congregation (1Pet.2:1-10). It is the responsibility of the priest to set an example of the Christian ministry and to transform the believers through his preaching to a higher quality of life, better guidance and give them proper instructions, leadership, discipline and spiritual upliftment. The priest is not a substitute to undertake the ministry of the believers (laity). But his duty is to help them and prepare them for the ministry. The priest is the steward of the Sacrament. He represents his people before God. He is not expected to deprive the believers of the gifts of grace received by them; on the other hand he should rekindle the gift of grace and prepare them for the mission of the church.

The Sacrament of Ordination

The aim of ordination is to set apart a person to give leadership to the church, to carry out the will of God, and to represent the believers in the mission of the church. In the process of ordination the church prays for the candidate so that he receives God's blessing, he confirms his call for the ministry and to get God's grace and strength to help him carry out the mission of the church. According to the tradition of the Bible and the Church, the priest is elevated to that position through laying on of hands and prayer. '*Kaiveppu*' (ordination) is a sign of God's blessing. The call, the selection and the appointment are through God and God's church. The only way to become a priest is through the call and seal of the church.

The power of the priest is derived from the services and ministry of Christ. This is confirmed through ordination with the help of the Holy Spirit

Analysis of the order of service of the ordination

Structure: Ordination is conducted during the course of the Holy Communion. To start with, the Bishop reads the creed known as

'*Homologia*', to the candidates. It could also be done after the ordination, according to some sources. The order of service for Deacon and the Priest is more or less the same. Both start with an opening prayer. It is followed by a short prayer consisting of verses from Psalms and other books of the Bible. This is called '*kukklion*' which means a cycle, *Promion* (introduction) *Sedara* (long Prayer) *Kola* (Voice) *Ethro* (prayer of incense) and the reading of the Bible make up the first part of the service. The Nicene creed and the two prayers are recited. The first prayer is for officiating Bishop and the second one is for the candidate. The next one is known as the prayer of Arch Deacon for abiding presence of the Holy Spirit on the candidates. This is known as a proclamation (*Karasutho*). Then the officiating Bishop prays for the invocation of the Holy Spirit on himself. The Bishop proclaims that the candidate is ordained. Then the newly ordained priest puts on the vestments, stands in the middle of the altar facing the congregation and swings the censer. The communion service continues and at the end the ordained priest receives the blessing from the Bishop and goes through the kiss of peace with the other priests present there.

The Important Prayers

Introductory Prayer

It runs like this:- 'O Lord support these your servants with your powerful right hand and mighty arm, whom you have acquired with your precious blood. Put out and wipe from them all the works of the devil and grant that they may be satisfied with and rejoice in your salvation, and that they may draw close to you and bring Christian lambs before you now and forever'. It is implied in this prayer that the church is like a flock of sheep, won over by the blood of Jesus and that the candidate is like a shepherd in charge of the flock.

In the next prayer, the Bishop prays for God's blessing to be showered upon the candidates and that he may be dressed up in priestly white robe.

Promion and Sedra

In this long prayer (*Sedra*) references is made to many in the line of succession from Moses who were in charge of the flock and its duties. It is prayed that the candidates may be made fit for the service of the church. It is pertinent here to explain the responsibilities and qualities of the candidates. It goes like this:-

"Receive these your servants O' Lord, whom you have called with a holy and effectual calling that they may become ministers and

stewards of your divine mysteries, priests of your right hand, good governors, spiritual pillars who perform the duties of the priestly office”. The above prayer, pointing out the responsibilities and the qualities required for a successful priest, is very meaningful.

Prayer of incense (Ethro)

This is a prayer by the officiating Bishop to send the Holy Spirit to the candidates who are kneeling before God for His blessing and to receive His endless gifts. It is also prayed that God should receive this prayer as fragrance.

Scripture Readings

The Deacon reads the appropriate passages from the epistles of Peter and Paul describing the qualification and fitness of the candidate (1 Tim. 3:1-7, 4:12-16, Tit. 1:5-9, 1 Pet. 2:1-10). Through this the church is announcing the biblical basis which supports the Sacrament of ordination.

The candidates kneel in a row, and the Bishop covers their heads with ‘*Sosappa*’ (Veil), and places the book of the Gospel over their head and reads from the same. This is an ancient practice of the Eastern churches still in vogue. The passage read relates to the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the authority of declaring the absolution of sins given to the church by Christ (John 14:15-20, 20-19-23). These are also instructions given by Christ to his disciples. In continuation the Bishop breathes on their head in the form of a cross that indicates receiving the gift of Holy Spirit on them, to help them to achieve their ministry in the church. ‘*Sosappa*’ is a symbol of the clouds and the presence of God, in this context according to our tradition. The Gospel is kept on their head in a symbolic message, that they accept the supremacy of the gospel. In the chanting that follows it is prayed that the Holy Spirit that spoke in the Old and New Testaments, and who strengthened the prophets and the apostles should also strengthen and bless these candidates. The Nicene creed is recited by the congregation.

Silent Prayer

The Bishop says a silent prayer for himself to give him renewed vigor and cleansing from all sins, so that he becomes worthy to carry on the ministry of the new covenant assigned to him. After that he prays for the candidates saying, “Receive as priests and make perfect these your servants who stand here and wait for your heavenly gift.”

Proclamation

The Archdeacon holding, the pastoral staff and facing north, stands at the threshold of the Madbaha says, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which supplies what is wanting with the good pleasure of God, and the power of the holy Spirit, be on those who are present here, and with fear and trembling and faith, stand before the altar bowing their heads and inwardly looking to you who dwell on high, and waiting for your heavenly gift”.

Proclamation by the Bishop

‘The grace of God has called out (Name) Deacon from the order of deacons to the order of Priest, to be priest in the Holy Church under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Seat of Malabar(Malankara), which loves Christ and is loved by Him’. This is done before the ordination.

The Archdeacon announces that the congregation should pray for the continuous grace and fellowship of the Holy Spirit to be with the candidates.

Prayer

This is followed by a prayer pleading for making the candidate suitable for the new role. The responsibility of the priest is also described here. In keeping with the dignity attached to God they may be trained to serve, to carry out the service in the altar and to celebrate the holy Sacraments and sing praises and prayers. These are the points of supplication in the above prayer.

Prayer for the invocation of Holy Spirit

It is the belief of the oriental churches that all Sacraments are sanctified and perfected by the Holy Spirit. In all the orders of prayer, this idea is present. (The relation between the Holy Spirit and the Sacrament of ordination is dealt with later in this book)

The Bishop facing the east once raises his hand; turns to the west, and waves his hands over the head of the candidate twice and prays for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the candidate. The candidates kneel down at that time. A prayer goes like this :- “O’ Lord our saviour, may the Holy Spirit come and rest upon each of them, according to your promise. O’ Lord deprive them not of the gift of the Holy Spirit. O’ Lord who receive prayers, we are asking for the Holy Spirit. Therefore we raise our voice and say; -O spirit the *paraclete*- you are Holy, O Spirit the creator of life- you are holy, O

Spirit whom we have obtained, you are Holy. O' Lord Glory be to you O' Lord of all for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the great and unspeakable mystery and for your wonderful works to our race". It is the invocation of the Holy Spirit that makes a candidate strong enough and worthy for the ministry.

Prayer at the time of Ordination

Hence the officiating Bishop, covers the candidate with his vestment (*kappa*) and placing his hands on the head of the candidate, says this important prayer. The contents of the prayer is as follows:-

This humble servant of yours may please be chosen for the position of a minister. Bless him with the grace of the Holy Spirit so that he will be able to carry out his duties.

The candidate who is ordained as a priest will have the following responsibilities according to this prayer: -

Witness to the gospel of the kingdom of God.

To offer spiritual sacrifice and offerings at the altar.

To baptize the people to a new life.

To guide the people with the light of Jesus Christ.

To become an instrument for the glorification of God through the church.

To receive Jesus at the time of his second coming and to get rewarded for exemplary work done by him as a priest.

Proclamation of the ordination

The Bishop places his right hand on the head of the candidate and says, this Deacon (name) is being ordained priest in the Holy Church under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic seat of Malabar(Malankara), before this assembly, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is made clear that the ordination is by the Holy Spirit and that the Bishop is only a mediator making the ordination for the church.

Thanksgiving Prayer

This is a prayer expressing thanks to God for sending the Holy Spirit to the candidates and pleading for the continuation of the grace of the Holy Spirit in their activities ahead.

With the right hand the Bishop helps the candidates to stand up and gives a copy of the Bible. Then the vestments (*Kappa*) is blessed and given to them. Newly ordained priest after swinging the incense later receives communion.

PROCLAMATION OF FAITH **(Homologia)**

This is a creed of faith, read out to the candidates and accepted by them. This word '*Homologia*' is a Greek word. It also means a recitation of the faith. This could be done before or after the ordination, according to some old manuscripts. This deals with the faith of the church in general and the personal qualities expected in the candidates.

The declaration of the faith of the church

The candidates are instructed to hold fast to the true belief of the church. That is the belief in the doctrine of Holy Trinity.

The incarnation of Jesus, Virgin birth, and Christ's full human nature and his divinity, are to be observed relentlessly by the candidates.

The candidates are obliged to keep up the faith and the apostolic instructions of the church. Since the Metropolitan is the defender of the faith the candidates are advised to follow suit in faith and practice on the same pattern as the Metropolitan.

Importance of good character

Reading the appropriate passages from the epistles of St. Paul, the Bishop pinpoints the importance of the personal qualities that make a good priest:

- Purity of life
- Fasting and praying for the people.
- Helping the needy
- Setting an example of family life.

Making the Sign of the Cross in the Register

Each candidate is made to draw a sign of the cross in the register in confirmation of his pledge not to deviate from the accepted belief or faith of the church.

Tonsuring

At the end of the Homologia, the Metropolitan clips a portion of the hair, in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to denote the fact that he has dedicated himself to this holy position. It is believed that this clipping of the hair is borrowed from the monastic community (monks). The wording used in these vows is found to be different in the various orders of services. For example, in the book of the order of ordination published by K.C Joshua and in the Book of the Orthodox Church the following version is seen:- This crop of hair

from your head is being clipped in confirmation of your renouncement of worldly pleasures'. This indicates that the candidate should not have any type of worldly pleasure. He is detached from all worldly pleasures.

Raising the Candidates by their hands

After the clipping of the hair of the candidate, by holding the right hand he is helped to stand and to kneel in the middle of the '*Madbaha*' (altar) facing the east. The ordination service starts at this point, saying that "The Holy Spirit is calling you". He is helped to stand up holding his right hand. In some order of ordination this is done after following the two instructions.

The instructions to the candidates

The Bishop gives instructions to the newly ordained priest, about the way of entering the 'Altar', the way the Holy articles are to be handled and what he should be careful about during the Holy Service.

The call to the People

The Bishop makes the following announcement to the congregation. "Our beloved believers, let us pray to Jesus Christ to bless and sanctify the newly ordained priests who are our loving brothers. Let God give you good children from whom desirable Deacons and Priests can be chosen, for ordination." Here ends the Homologia.

Ministry and Mission of the Church

All the people are called upon to become the children of God. All are required to propagate the cause of the kingdom of God. In the BEM Document of the W.C.C. it is stated that responsible people with trust in Jesus Christ are required to carry out the mission of the church successfully. The life and witness of the church should be projected through their service. Christ is the rallying point of the unity of the church and also the origin of its mission. Without ordination there is no church and without church there is no mission. They are mutually complementary; mission needs a field for its activities.

The most important duty of the priest is to get the people to work together and to organize the affairs of the church. Gospel preaching, conducting Sacraments and worship services to prepare the believers and make them aware of their Christian duties and bring them to successful culmination.

The minister should encourage the believers to offer themselves for the good cause of the church. They must be made aware that they

are called for the work of salvation and the Gospel work among their fellow beings and also outside. There is a special obligation on the priest to strengthen the church and to shepherd the flock for the mission. They must be fortified by the grace of God.

Role of the Holy Spirit in the Ordination

The part played by the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of ordination is discussed in the light of the ordination service.

If we scrutinize the order of service of the ordination of the Malankara Mar Thoma Church, we can understand the important role of the Holy Spirit in the service. The Holy Spirit bestows the grace of God and also makes the candidate suitable and ready for it. In the ordination service from the beginning to the end the plea for making the candidates suitable for the service of God is made. The chief celebrant of the whole service is also the Holy Spirit. In the light of the order of ordination it is necessary to discuss the role of the Holy Spirit.

In the ancient manuscript the Bishop says, "The Holy Spirit calls you to become the Deacon /Priest in the holy church" and holds the right hand of the candidate and takes him to the centre of the 'Madhbaha'. This is the first step of the ordination, from which it is clear that the candidate is called up by the Holy Spirit for this service. It is important that the candidates understand (realize) that they are called and selected by the Holy Spirit.

After the opening prayer the Bishop prays, "O God shower your blessings on those who are gathered here and also on those who are awaiting your gracious gifts from heaven". Even in the next hymn the prayer is to make the candidates wise, pure and blessed to do their work. It continues, "Holy God, who endued the apostles with wisdom by the tongue of flames, please sanctify these your servants waiting to be treated the same way".

The Gospel of John (John 20: 19-23) is read by the Bishop. While reading verse 22 he breathes on the candidate in a symbolic way and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit". By this it is recollected that Christ before sending his disciples and apostles they were subjected to the influence of Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit lends them the power for the mission.

The next prayer for the Holy Spirit is to descend on them and to sanctify them. It goes like this, "let the Holy Spirit which came down to the mount Sinai come down to them, the Holy Spirit that came to

the disciples in the upper room come down to them, let the Holy Spirit that came to the Son in the shape of a dove and sat on him come down to them". This prayer is in the form of a chanting sung by the congregation and the participating priests. Even here the plea to the Holy Spirit is repeated, asking for grace and sanctity.

Then comes the Nicene creed. The officiating Bishop prays for himself, for the blessing of God, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Arch Deacon holding the pastoral staff stands at the threshold of *Madbhaha* facing west and reads the following declaration. Let us pray, "The power of the Holy Spirit be on those who are present here, and with fear and trembling and faith stand before the altar bowing their heads and inwardly looking to you who dwell on high, and waiting for your heavenly gift. The congregation says '*Kyere elason*' (Lord have mercy) in response three times.

The corresponding prayer is found in the order of other churches also. In a silent prayer the Bishop asks for conferring the grace of the Holy Spirit on the candidates. The most important prayer in the ordination, is beseeching the Holy Spirit to abide in the hearts and minds of the candidates, and this is repeated thrice.

"O, our saviour, may the Holy Spirit come and rest upon each of them, according to your promise. O Lord deprive them not of the gift of the Holy Spirit. O, Lord who receives prayers we ask you for the Holy Spirit. We praise you for your gift of the Holy Spirit for the mystery that cannot be comprehended and for the miracles you had done for human kind". The order of service for ordaining deacon, the prayer used is given as below:- Placing the hands on the head of the candidate he says,

"Take pity on this servant of thine and endow him with the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is not because of our goodness but it is because of your mercy these servants get God's grace".

The implication is that the celebrants are acting only on behalf of God.

When the priests are ordained, the order of service is as follows:- God be kind to him so that the great gift of the Holy Spirit is given to this candidate and he is strengthened by unwavering faith and unquestionable behavior.

After the proclamation the following prayer is said:- "Because of your unlimited mercy, accept our supplication at the time of this ordination, and send your Holy Spirit to abide in them."

At the end of the ordination, after making them wear the vestments, in the '*Huthama*' (concluding prayer) the Bishop prays and expresses the good wishes that all the services rendered in the Holy church by these newly ordained priests in the church be of the highest order.

In the light of the above studies, it is clear that this Sacrament is well based on the Holy Spirit as explained in the Bible. The selection and appointment of any person for the service of the church is done by the Holy Spirit. The ordination and the granting of grace are also done by the Holy Spirit through the Bishop. It is the Holy Spirit that gives the strength and support to the newly ordained being rooted in Scripture and of the Apostolic practices. What we see in the ordination is a collective prayer of the church for the continuous activity of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray and wish that the candidates would maintain the dignity of the church that loves Christ and is loved by him, keeping themselves empowered by the Holy Spirit.

1. For a detailed study of the Structure and Theology of the Ordination Rite, see

George Mathew : *An investigation into the Development and Doctrine of the Rite for the Ordination of Priest in the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Trinity College Bristol (1990).

X

ANOINTING THE SICK

Preaching of the Gospel and healing of the sick were two elements of the ministry of Jesus. The arrival of Christ as a savior of humankind and his work for the kingdom of heaven are indicated by this. Jesus himself declared in his message to John the Baptist saying, "Go and tell John, the things you have seen and heard; the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Luke. 7:18-23). When Christ selected his disciples the instruction given was to preach the gospel and to heal the sick. The same mandate is given to the church. The Sacrament of anointing the sick with oil gives mental, physical and spiritual upliftment and a feeling of peace with the world and God. This is a great gift given by God to alleviate the physical and mental sufferings of the believers in the modern world replete with conflicts and tension. This is the way to impart to them healing of the spirit and comfort of the body. This Sacrament is discussed in detail in the biblical basis and its historical background. The subject of our study will be the theology, socio-missiological dimensions and its place in the liturgy of the anointing of the sick. This Sacrament is not given due importance in our church, and it needs a meaningful and sincere study for its usefulness.

Biblical Basis

The importance of the Sacrament is to be appreciated in the light of the teachings on healing as found in the Old and New Testaments. So let us study the human problems connected with disease and the process of healing.

Old Testament

God has the power and sovereignty over human beings. Any violation of God's law is punished with disease and sickness. If sin leads us to sickness and downfall, the absence of sin and obedience to God will bring us lasting peace. God is the real source of healing. As a result of attaining inner peace, physical ailments will be banished. The media adopted by God for these purpose were the Priests and the prophets, specially appointed for these by God. It was the priests who brought the people back into the main stream of life after certifying them to be whole (Lev. 13:6,8 14:2). The prophets also have shared the above responsibility in the name of God (1 King 14:1).

The Jews believed that all diseases were sent by God or sent with His knowledge (directly or indirectly by God) and therefore the healing also should come from God. So the sick were expected to confess their sins and return to God renouncing sins forever.

In the Old Testament, health is considered to be the sign of prosperity and sickness a sign of weakness (Psa. 3:11, 6:2, 32:1-3, 38:1-7, 39:2, 88:4-6, 102:9-11). When you are sick you should turn to God because he is the Lord of life (Exo. 38:9-14). God Himself causes the wounds and He Himself does the healing (Deut. 32:39). The greatest physician is God (Exo. 15:26). God Himself takes the initiative in the healing process because the disease causes a strained relationship between human being and God. When one puts his faith in response to God's initiative the healing is accomplished. The role of God as a physician is repeated (Gen. 20:17, Exo. 15:16). It is to be noted that in the Old Testament there was no prohibition of medical treatment for healing. For example Isaiah treated King Hezekiah and he was cured (2 Kings 20:7, Jer. 8:22, Ecl. 7:20).

New Testament

The Gospel writers have recorded several instances of healing of the sick by Jesus during His ministry. This is a sign of the foretaste of the kingdom to come. The Mission of Christ was life-giving. "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10: 10). This mission of the gift of life was declared by Jesus. He healed many sick people, he instructed his disciples to continue the good work (Mark-6: 13). The disciples obeyed him and continued the good work (Mark 16:18, James 5:14,15).

Following the examples set by the Apostles, the Church fathers and the priests anointed the sick with oil and prayed for them. "Is any

one among you suffering? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord and the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven (James 5:14, 15). The good Samaritan used oil and wine in his treatment of the traveler who was wounded (Luke 10:34). It is stated that the disciples anointed the sick with oil and prayed for them (Mark 6: 13).

Jesus did not teach that sickness was the result of sins; though there is some relation between the two (John 9:22). Though death and sickness were incomprehensible to man, yet they have some meaning according to the teaching of Christ and this is acknowledged by the anointment with oil. This is a Sacrament in which the believers are made participants in the suffering and death of Jesus. The healing process has been always done in the name of Jesus and His power. Apostles never claimed any credit for the healing they had done; they always emphasized that it was done by Jesus (Acts. 3: 6-7)

The Anointment - in the history of the Church

This Sacrament started as directed by Jesus and it was continued by the church during the time of the Apostles. This is evidenced by the writings and manuscripts of the Church fathers in the history of the church. In his letters Origen refers to confess and receive the anointing for the healing of the sick. Another Church father, John Chrysostom says (381) 'as referred in the Epistle of James, the priests of the church were called upon to anoint the sick with oil and heal them'. Cyril of Alexandria (412) also directed the leaders to anoint the sick with oil and pray and heal them. Robula, the Bishop of Edessa, Dyanasius of Ariopogus also referred to this practice. This is a great help to the members of the church to face life and death, with hope and conviction since this tradition had its origin from the time of Jesus Christ which is continued by the church even today.

In the middle ages, this tradition was considered as 'extreme unction' by some Churches and treated as the last rite. Because of the long association with the Catholic church and the influence of the Portugese, the people of Malabar looked upon last rites with awe and fear. After the Vatican Council in 1964 the Catholic Church has altered this attitude and takes it as a healing process of the members.

Theology of the anointment of the Sick

God the creator is the saviour and healer of the sick. Creation of human being in His own image is part of God's plan of salvation.

Suffering and death should not be considered as a punishment; but should be taken as an opportunity to identify ourselves with the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him, by the power of God towards you” (2 Cor. 13: 4). This way we will also be glorified with Jesus (Rom. 8: 16,19).

Through this Sacrament we take part in the suffering and death of Christ in a symbolic way. Suffering is a way to salvation and death is an entrance to salvation. Deliverance from diseases is a victory over the power of the devil. Death is a gate to our next life through the resurrection of Christ. The believers experience the mercy and grace of Jesus by this Sacrament. This is the way to experience the Christian life and to have an encounter with Christ.

Anointment as a Sacramental Healing

The starting point of this Sacrament is seen in St. Mark, “And they cast out many demons, anointed them with oil many who were sick, and healed them. So they went out and preached that people should repent (Mark 6:12,13). In James 5:14 it is recorded that the church had adopted this tradition. Apostle James preached that we should pray during sufferings and sing and praise during the time of happiness and joy. The priests used to pray for the sick by the tradition of the church. This is a prayer of intercession by the believers and the church. The priests are entrusted with this ministry. They pray as well as apply the oil in the name of Jesus. This is a source of grace for the sick because it is done in the name of the Holy Trinity. So this is taken as a Sacrament. The prayer of faith will save the sick (James 5:15). The forgiveness of sins signifies our participation in the mystery of salvation. It is the grace of forgiveness of Jesus that is revealed here. This Sacrament is undertaken for the believers comfort, remission of sins and for his healing.

Since the confession of sins is a necessary condition, this Sacrament is not administered if the person is unconscious. Another prayer is conducted by the priest in such situations. They are left to the mercy of God.

The sick gets physical and spiritual comfort through this Sacrament. If the person does not recover, this helps for a peaceful end and if he survives it is for his healing and well being. One or the other happens according to the will of God. The Sacrament is applicable in either

case. This adds to the persons degree of dependence, coverage and hope. The faith in God firms up. Death is way of the spirit to defeat diseases. Like Baptism it is identification with the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The analysis of the order of service of the anointing the sick ²

Forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the disease are attributed to this Sacrament by the church. The order of service of the Antiochene churches is used by our church with appropriate changes in keeping with the reformation. There were two sets of order of service in use in the church. The first one is for anointment with oil and such persons are also given holy communion if so desired. Second one is the prayer for very critically sick people. They are helped to pass through the crisis with renewed faith and hope through the mercy of God.

The first service starts with the prayer to the Holy Trinity to bestow, comfort, grace and cure on the sick. This prayer is for the cure and comfort of the person in the totality of his person. Later Psalm 6:1-4 which is a Psalm of repentance is read out. Then leads the person in a prayer which he repeats. Then the Priest recites, prayers known as *promion*, *sedra*, *Ethro*. This is meant as a plea to God the good physician for the forgiveness of sins and cure the disease. Here the Deacon reads the passage from James 5:13-19. The priest reads the Gospel of St. Mathew 10:5-10. These relate to the anointment with oil and prayer for the sick. After chanting the Priest places his hand on the head of the sick and says the following prayer-”Bestow mercy upon him. Shower your grace upon his weakness grant your grace freely to him. So arm him that he might be free from all pains, sickness chastisements and unbearable temptations. Grant him your abiding strength and so cheer him that his countenance may be transformed by your salvation (order of worship page 70). After another prayer the priest anoints the sick and says a prayer which goes like this, “In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be healed and cleansed and let the sins and trespasses you have committed knowingly or unknowingly be pardoned, and your evil thoughts and all the works of the evil one be removed from you, pray that you attain peace, purity and sanctify and get remission of your sins committed knowingly or unknowingly (Order of service page:70). It is a practice to anoint the sick person with *Sythe* (Olive Oil) (But some churches smear *Sythe* on the forehead, chest, nose, ear, lips and limbs).

If the sickness is incurable or the patient is critical without applying the *Sythe* the priest making a sign of the cross on the patient's forehead says the following prayer: "May almighty God have compassion upon you, may forgive all your sins and lead you in to eternal life (Page 72). One or more of the following Psalms can be read to the sick persons (Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 142, 143). These are known as penitential Psalms.

The corresponding prayers in the case of priests and Bishop is called "*Kanthela Susrusha*" (candle service). In this service candles are lit to signify the renouncement of sins committed by the five senses of the human body. This is not practiced in all churches.

Anointment of the sick was started by Christ and continued by the Apostles and it is still in vogue. If the sins and disease are the marks of the fallen humanity, this Sacrament through confession of sins, gives him deliverance. The anointment with olive oil is a symbol of the grafting with the real olive tree which is Jesus Christ, resulting in abundant life and fruits.

Social Dimension of this Service

When the Sacrament of anointment is conducted the church is announcing to the sick that the whole Christian community is with him. The minister and the believers establish an identity with the sick and pray together. It is the faith of the church and its prayer that imparts the healing to the sick. The faith of God's people is a source of cure. Considering the relation between the diseases and sin, people are advised to be free from sin as a preventive measure. This is a Sacrament which will go down to comfort the helpless and the abandoned among the sick. This also makes it clear that the church is prepared to care for the isolated and the weaker sections of society.³

The Missionary Dimension of this Sacrament

This Sacrament depicts the care and mission of the church, through the worship service. Through this Sacrament God touches a person, in his totality. By doing this the church follows the devices of Christ. Either on a Sunday or any special day, after the communion service, Holy communion is given to the sick people in their residences (In our church the communion service is conducted in their own houses). This expresses the care and love that the church bestows on them. Usually the anointment is done before that. The healing obtained enables the sick to continue their Christian mission. Sickness is a way of demystifying the holy mysteries of God.

There is close bond between the plan of salvation and the healing ministry of the Church. In a way it is the sign of the arrival of God's kingdom and the inauguration of the era of Christ. Therefore, this Sacrament is an essential part of the church's mission. The sick gets physical and spiritual strength. They realize that God had pardoned them because God is love. This helps people to overcome the worldly cares and pressures. Whether they get well or not some people take this as an opportunity for an interaction with God and go deep into the realms of faith. This Sacrament makes them understand that they are not alone in the trace of their lives and that there are other people filled with God's love to share their experiences.

Through this Sacrament which was in vogue from the time of Jesus, the sick people experience the grace of God. The eastern idea that sickness is sin, God is the physician, Christian discipline is the treatment, and the salvation is healing, to be made subject of detailed study. Punishment is not important; but the treatment is. The way of Jesus is love and compassion, not threats and intimidation. Correction and discipline are important in this context. Forgiveness of sin is not necessarily deliverance from guilt; but it is freedom from sickness. This truth is received in the Sacrament of anointment.⁴

The church continues its healing mission inspired by God without ever expecting any reward or fame. But today the same is being exploited and commercialized by the protagonists indulging in 'Miracles' and by the so called 'saints'. This services which was done for the glory of God, is now degenerating into a pitiable state where pretenders and 'God men' rule the roost. Discarding the way of the cross and the suffering attached there to, people are now indulging in the so called 'spirituality' with some ulterior motives. It is high time that the church discourages this tendency. Considering that the Sacrament is entrusted to the church and still in use, it should be pruned to the needs of the times and used after the communion service or in any other appropriate context. The church is bound to retrieve and salvage the physical, mental and spiritual health of the sick people through the Sacrament adapted as mentioned above.⁵

Note:

1. T.J Joshua Healing Ministry in Bible. *PUROHITHAN*, Vol. XI. 1(1993) (Mal) pp.7-10.
2. The Visitation and Anointing the sick 'Mar Thoma Syrian Church *Order of Service* (Tiruvalla, 1988) pp.63-75.
3. J.Maniparampil *Sacraments*, Alur (1995) (Mal)
4. K.M George *PUROHITHAN* Vol.XI.1 p.25.
5. Also see George Mathew Anointing the Sick: A Sacrament of Healing in *PARISH MINISTRY*. F (1995) No.44. (Mal) pp.1-12.

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